Best-selling Author

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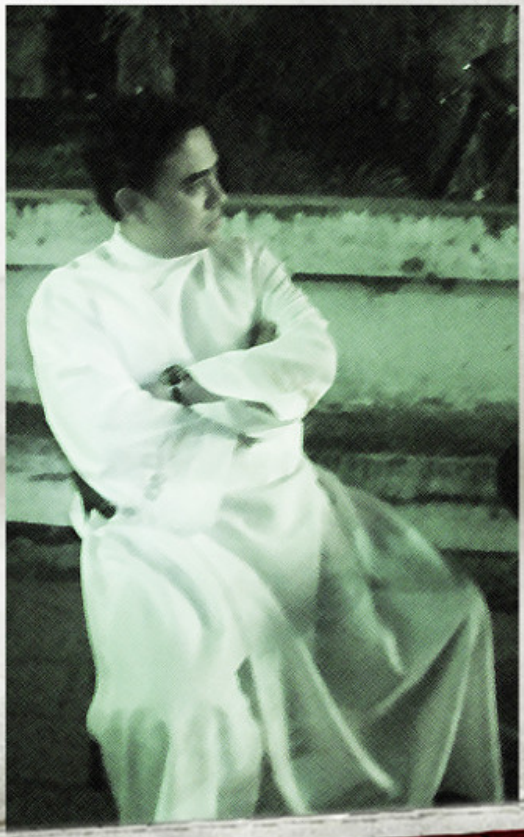
EXORCIST



A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

With Manual of Prayers

EXORCIST

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FR. JOSE FRANCISCO C. SYQUIA

EXORCIST
A Spiritual Journey

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I dedicate this humble work
to Mama Mary;
I place it and all who would read it
under her mantle of love
and protection.

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FOREWORD

In every age God raises "voices from the wilderness" to guide his people into the way of peace and be heralds of the Truth.

With the advent of rapid advances in technology which has touched practically all spheres in our human lives, our age has fomented mind-boggling wildernesses of human powers and esoteric knowledge. As a result we have become more and more fascinated with what we can do and what we can aspire for—a Babel of sorts. Alongside the wheat grows the weed sown by the enemy. Globalization has also made possible the ease by which evil can interfere in our lives, in our country, and simultaneously all over the planet.

As a cloistered nun of 36 years, formed to develop our sensitivity to the interior movements of the psyche, I can humbly say that more and more I am convinced of evil trying to influence practically every second of our mortal lives—ranging from the extremely subtle like the whiff of a breeze, to the most blatant temptations. This is why Christ has warned us to be ever vigilant of that "roaring lion constantly seeking prey to devour."

That this book should appear among us at this time is a call amidst this wilderness. It is a voice that reminds us that in the midst of evil there is the ever-present Good News. In the midst of confusion and despair there is a path to peace. In the midst of great shadows the Light, the person of Christ, eternally shines.

Truly the work of a priest of God, this book teaches us how to focus and keep moving towards the goal of our Christian journey: transforming union with Christ in spite of whatever evil havoc we can find ourselves in. What is more interesting is the transparency of Fr. Jocis as he interweaves these teachings in his biography. By his own life-witness, he shows how life becomes exciting when we begin to see how Christ relates with us in our day-to-day lives.

I pray that all the readers of this book find the reason why we need to "be holy as your heavenly Father is holy."

Sr. Mary Bernard Tescam of the Sacred Heart, OCD
Mother Prioress
Carmel of St. Therese Monastery

PREFACE

It is by battles against hell and by resistance to temptations that we give God fruits of our love.

—St. John Mary Vianney

Always despise him [the devil] and arm yourself against him with increasing steadfastness of faith, as it is written, "Like a roaring lion, your adversary, the devil, prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith." Don't let the many snares of this infernal beast frighten you. Jesus, who is always with you and who will fight with and for you, will never permit you to be tricked and overcome.

—St. Padre Pio

The young energetic exorcist priest was a hard worker in the Lord's vineyard and because of this, he experienced a lot of demonic harassments. The simple and frugal rectory where he was staying was truly what one would call a "haunted house." When the sun went down and all was dark and quiet, unexplained phenomena would start to occur. As the priest would prepare to go to sleep after a hard day's work, without any warning loud bangings would suddenly reverberate in the room above his. He already knew that there was no scientific explanation for the sources of these deafening noises. There was no one living above his room, for this was the attic and he had checked and rechecked the source of these bangings but could find none. Bang! Bang! Bang! It seemed to him that huge stones were being thrust on the floor above him. Consistent searching for the source of the noises was futile. The young hardy priest could not stand the nightly raucous noises any longer, he chose then to change his sleeping quarters. It was useless; these unearthly noises followed him even to his new room. Bang! Bang! Bang! The unearthly sounds continued above his new room. Little did the priest know that these harassments were only the beginning of a long string of paranormal phenomena that would unnerve even the most courageous person.

As the young priest was getting used to these continuous rackets above his room, a new kind of assault started to begin; the moment he would turn out the lights and would lie on his bed to go to sleep,

he would then be physically attacked by unseen forces. Once he said that, “I was tormented by a hideous beast, something like a bear that tried to smother me in bed.” It truly was demonic in nature since the devil usually attacks through smothering or strangling persons during the night. This is one of Satan’s tactics to sap the energy of those consecrated to and serving God. The next day, the young priest would be left exhausted although he continued to fulfill his duties faithfully. But the smothering attacks were just one of the preternatural harassments the priest started experiencing. He tells us, “No sooner do I fall asleep than a booming voice shouts into my ear and drives me out of my mind.” In addition, when he would be at the point of falling asleep, his pillow would start shaking and even his entire bed would join in the shaking! The demon was truly angry at this priest of God.

Once his entire bed was lifted off the floor and he tells us, “The devil lifted my bed aloft and let it drop to the floor.” The preternatural attacks also assaulted his sense of hearing; he would hear at night horrifying sounds like blood-curdling screams; and they occurred right inside his room! What was also extraordinary was that there would suddenly materialize inside his room strong gusts of wind that would blow around his room and scatter all his books and papers. This really was a very intense demonic harassment. The priest also witnessed other truly terrifying preternatural events such as seeing a table inside his room levitating while at the same time rocking back and forth!

Seeking continual assistance from his companion priests in the rectory proved of no avail; no one wanted to sleep with him in his room since they themselves experienced similar horrifying paranormal harassments when they tried to accompany him at night. What was most horrifying was when this young priest would visually see his demonic attackers! Once he saw his wooden door burst open and a hideous monster with jaws wide open charged him in order to devour him. That was enough to make a person die of fright! Sometimes the demonic entities would appear as various animals such as a tiger, a wolf, or a monster serpent. They would hover around his room and even leap on him while he was on his bed. But making the sign of the cross always protected him.

With all these experiences that occurred in the dead of night and alone, he was once asked whether he was afraid. Yet with all his harrowing experiences, this was his surprising answer, “Just as I have no fear of angels because, as I hope, I am a friend of God, likewise I do not fear demons because I am an enemy of God’s enemies. He will protect me. Satan can do whatever he pleases now,

because this is his moment, but mine will come, too!" This young truly courageous priest was an exorcist and a staunch defender of the Church against occult practitioners such as spiritists and mediums. He frequently challenged the powers of these occult practitioners and always triumphed over them through the power of God. It was like Elijah confronting again the 400 "priests" of Baal.

As an exorcist, this young priest could sometimes see demons on the backs of those in mortal sin. Once, a 35-year-old woman was brought to him. Even before he arrived, the possessed woman knew that he was arriving and when he tried to trace the sign of the cross with a picture of Mama Mary on the forehead of the possessed, the woman became violent and wild. She was so strong that no one could hold her down and she even writhed like a serpent. The young exorcist made a prophecy by stating that she would be set free on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception which in fact occurred.

He continued his parochial ministry faithfully even though he was continually tested by demonic forces. His deep faith, heroic courage, and faithfulness came from the fact that he was a living saint. We all know him today as the saint, Don Bosco. This saint mentioned an important fact; what always saved him from these assaults of Satan was his deep devotion to Mama Mary. As an aside, the sounds that disturbed him in the attic ceased when he placed a small picture of Mama Mary there and asked for her assistance. This saint truly was a visible witness of how nothing can withstand the power of our loving God.

This book is the first in a series of books that has been a long time coming. But the inspiration to write it came only a few weeks ago due to the urgency of the times. Now that more and more Catholics are starting to discover that Jesus is the only and true Healer and Deliverer, a great number are now turning away from occult practitioners (from both the New Age and folk religiosity) and seeking help for their spiritual maladies, from the Church that Christ established 2,000 years ago.

Not so long ago, across the globe, many Catholics saw the Church merely as a moral guide and teacher of dogma without any real power. Today, this is changing! As the early Church converted thousands due to preaching as well as exercising the divine power God vested on her (healing, expelling spirits, miracles, and the like), many today are discovering again that the Church is not merely all talk. There is power behind her words; this is one of the signs that God's Kingdom is truly in our midst; the miracles are starting to grow more and more in number and intensity!

The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons (Mt 10:7b-8a).

We find that there are more priests who are now exercising the charisms of healing and deliverance, and there are also more priests actively involved in the ministry of exorcism.

He summoned the Twelve and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases (Lk 9:1).

A great number of the laity, especially those in the Catholic Charismatic Movement, are also now involved in the use of early Church charisms including deliverance.

These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons (Mk 16:17).

Yet with all these recent developments, there is still a great need for more devoted and trained Catholics; priests, religious, and laity, who would minister to the thousands and thousands of people who are sick and under the bondage of demonic powers.

Because of this, I felt the urgent need to write and share what I can to those called to these ministries of compassion. This is meant to impart lessons I gained through my own studies and experiences throughout the many years that I was involved in the ministry of deliverance and exorcism. This work may hopefully guide those in the ministries of healing, deliverance, and exorcism to develop properly the charisms that God has graciously bestowed on them to build up his Church.

This book, the first of three volumes, will focus on the basic spiritual dispositions necessary in the healing, deliverance, and especially the exorcism ministry.

The second volume, in this series, will deal with our spiritual allies in this war for souls, Mama Mary and the saints. It will also give an in-depth look at the fallen angels because only by knowing our enemies will we be able to confront them courageously and effectively.

The third volume will center on practical guidelines for both the exorcist/deliverance minister and the victim. It would also include the many lessons which we learned in our office (Archdiocese of Manila Office of Exorcism); this is so, so that the many lessons we have gained throughout the years where we applied, to particular cases, the teachings and traditions of the Church regarding deliverance and exorcism, may be of benefit also to others. This third volume will also discuss more about folk religiosity and how it is causing a lot of suffering and difficulties for our country as a whole; this belief system, which continues to remain more or less hidden, is affecting greatly the living out of our faith, hence we see that even though we are the only truly Catholic country in Asia, we are one of the worst off (economically, politically, morally, and spiritually). Readers will also

find the topic of discernment because the devil is the greatest deceiver of all time and many have and are still being deceived by him to enter pacts (whether intentional or unintentional) with him. This, he does especially through magic, sorcery, and the occult. Let us always keep in mind that the devil will always try to appear as an angel of light, hence discernment is of paramount importance in the life of a Catholic.

I have decided to come out with a three-volume set that would be released one at a time instead of one larger work due to my busy schedule both in my work in the seminary and in the ministry of deliverance and exorcism. Honestly, I am a person who has difficulty multitasking and when I tend to jump from one type of work to another, it takes a lot of energy for me to gain momentum to begin the new work. So I hope the reader can bear with me regarding my decision for a three-volume set.

This three-volume work is Catholic in its entirety; resources whether books, talks, tapes, or interviews are all from Catholic sources. Yes, other Christian denominations have their own deliverance and healing ministries; but what is important to remember is that the Catholic Church instituted by Christ 2,000 years ago has the fullness of the truth and the authority of the Lord. Whatever good there is in the other Christian denominations already exists within our Church and in all its entirety; containing all that we need so we can have fullness of life both in this world and much more in the next, as well as all that we need to be able to destroy the strongholds and the works of Satan. All these are already found within our Church! The challenge, of course, is to learn about them. Many turn to other religions, cults, sects, and the occult for help because they have no knowledge of the fullness of grace and blessings that Jesus has already given to his Body, the Church.

It is recommended that the reader first read my first book entitled, *Exorcism: Encounters with the Paranormal and the Occult.* This will give him the necessary doctrinal foundations to better understand this treatise (and the following volumes) as well as allow him a more comprehensive picture of the entire ministry.

When my first book (*Exorcism: Encounters with the Paranormal and the Occult*) had just come out, I heard that there were some who were afraid to read this book because they stated that the stories here are real unlike reading other books on the paranormal which, at least at the back of one's mind, may or may not be true. But the problem can be likened to someone with cancer, who complains about a lump in his body but still would rather not have a checkup, fearing what he might discover; he continues to postpone until his situation becomes truly irreversible. Prevention is always much better than the cure. I remember the comforted and reassured face of a person who came to me for assistance

just last week and who thought that God did not care for her and therefore was to blame for all her maladies; right after we ministered to her, she truly discovered that because of certain openings in her life, it was the unseen enemy of man that was causing all her physical and psychological infirmities and which also tended to block the consolations and graces that God had planned for her.

So again, this volume would be focusing on the spiritual disposition necessary to be truly an instrument of God in the ministry of exorcism and deliverance; hence the subtitle is named “a spiritual journey.”

I would like to emphasize that the most important dimension to be developed in the ministry of exorcism and deliverance is the interior disposition of the minister, not method, skill, or technique. An integral part of the spirituality of an exorcist is having an intimate and personal relationship with Mama Mary which I will be expounding on in the 2nd volume. The guidance and protection of Mama Mary is indispensable when confronting the devil. We see her spoken about from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation; she has been given to the Church, as a priceless gift by God, to journey with us throughout the entirety of humanity’s salvation history.

Hopefully, this treatise would aid the reader to gain the spiritual dispositions necessary to be truly a minister according to the mind of Christ. With the dispositions of Christ present in the minister (his authority, sentiments, attitudes, and motivations), a successful conclusion will always be assured.

It is highly recommended that the chapters focusing on the spirituality of the exorcist be not merely read and reread but more importantly that it be brought to prayer and pondered in solitude until the necessary interior dispositions that animated Jesus and his saints also animate the reader. Again, a cursory reading of these chapters will not suffice.

With these proper interior dispositions, a minister would not only be able to be God’s effective instrument in liberating people from demonic bondage but he will also be an effective instrument of the Lord in the healing ministry. The same faith that is of utmost importance for an exorcist is the same faith needed to heal the sick. Hence, those in the healing ministry would also benefit a lot from internalizing the dispositions presented in this work.

All the stories recounted in this volume are true; of course, certain names and details have been changed to protect the identity of the persons involved and to foster a smoother flow of the narratives.

I place these three volumes under the loving and protective mantle of Mama Mary so that this work would truly be pleasing to God and bring glory and honor only and always to him.

St. Michael, leader and guardian of those of us still battling in this

spiritual war on earth, protect and watch over all those who would read these books so that they may experience the deep and tangible love of the Father for them and respond also in love towards him and those people in need whom he sends their way!

To the readers, please pray always a personal prayer to the Holy Spirit before reading so that God may bring you to his truth and draw you ever closer to his heart.

Definition of Terms

Possession. A state wherein demons take full control of the body (not the soul) of a person; they speak and act without the consent of the person and the person later has no knowledge of what transpired while he was under their control. The mental, affective, and volitive faculties of the patient are suspended.

Exorcist. Who are exorcists? The instructions from the Roman Ritual point out that an exorcist is someone who is expressly and particularly authorized by the Ordinary (bishop) to perform an exorcism.

Canon Law, Canon 1172 no. 1 states: "No one can legitimately perform exorcisms over the possessed unless he has obtained special and express permission from the local ordinary."

An exorcist uses the Roman Ritual of Exorcism to expel evil spirits from the possessed. A final point to remember is that all bishops are exorcists.

St. Alphonsus Liguori says that "exorcists have *ex opere operato* the unfailing power to drive out the devil" and that "this remains valid even though several exorcisms often remain unsuccessful; they do have an impact, although not a complete one, and they contribute to the weakening of the Devil's hold, no matter how incompletely."

Demonic Obsession. It includes compulsions that affect the imagination and the mind which are blasphemous and suicidal in nature. Also included here is the compulsive nature of habitual sin.

Oppression. It includes burdens or afflictions that torment from the outside and which are wide-ranging and diverse in nature. It can affect one's health, emotional and psychological well-being, spiritual life, relationships, and work. Seemingly out of nowhere, these areas in one's life deteriorate with no apparent cause. A person under oppression may experience physical pains, mental confusion, psychological illnesses, depression, horrifying hallucinations and visions, diabolical nightmares and auditory taunting voices from nowhere.

Deliverance Minister. Who are deliverance ministers? They may be priests, religious, or lay persons with the charism of deliverance. They may or may not be part of the Catholic Charismatic Movement. They use deliverance prayers (not the Roman Ritual of Exorcism) to expel evil spirits from the demonically obsessed and oppressed. The charism is made manifest to them due to the effectiveness of their deliverance prayers over those under demonic bondage. Another term used for a deliverance prayer is private exorcism.

St. Alphonsus Liguori (17th century), the noted moral theologian and Doctor of the Church, said that "private exorcism is permissible to all Christians; solemn exorcism is permissible only to ministers who are appointed to it, and then only with the express permission of the bishop."

Infestation. It happens when extraordinary demonic activity is centered on an animal, thing, or place. A "haunted house" would fall under the term infestation if the cause is proven to be demonic in origin.

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Exorcism

True Story

Lest the reader think that our viewpoint is that all unusual phenomena which happen today are explained by fraud and deception, we cite two cases, from as recently as 1971, in which the presumption favors genuinity and diabolical intervention, although in neither case was an investigation conducted, nor was this possible. Both cases involved priests whom we met in Washington and who had recently returned from foreign mission work, one a Benedictine educator, the other a White Father or Missionary of Africa.

The Benedictine Father had been assistant head master in an English secondary school which educated boys normally ranging from approximately twelve to eighteen years of age. The English have always had a special fascination for the occult and were particularly susceptible to the current fad. Four of the older boys began to manipulate an Ouija board and dabble in further overtures to the spirit world, apparently with increasing success in obtaining responses. In some way two of the younger boys were drawn into the group. They became afraid of some of the happenings at the meeting and sought help from the head master. Despite their fear of reprisals they were instructed to inform the head master of the time and place of the next meeting. Half an hour or so after the meeting started, the head master and assistant opened the door of the room, and were greeted by that chilly sensation which most often prevails where psychic phenomena occur. The room was darkened, but they were able to make out in the dim light the forms of the four older boys around a table with their hands joined in the manner of a séance. Since there was no reaction from them, the priests presumed that they were at least partially in a trance. Then they switched on the room light and were horrified to see the two younger boys pasted against the wall like postage stamps, about four feet above the floor, and in rather grotesque positions. When they had pulled the terrified lads down, they dismissed the other four from the school on the spot. To my knowledge there have been no further problems there.

The Missionary Father told of an incident connected with the

> baptism of a young man in his thirties. After proselytizing among a group for some time, the Father made arrangements for the baptism of the young man. At his own request, the ceremony was scheduled in the mission church on a Sunday afternoon, and a large number of friends and relatives were in attendance. Everything was moving along smoothly until the sacred moment of the ceremony when the catechumen is admitted to the Church. As the priest raised his hand to pour water over the man's head and was beginning to recite the words "I baptize you…" the young man's body suddenly shot straight upward some forty feet and hung suspended just beneath the ceiling of the church. Pandemonium broke loose; someone ran to summon the witch doctor. When the Father gained composure, he opened the Rite of Exorcism and began to recite the exorcism. Then the man's body returned to the ground, and the ceremony was completed without further incident. The Father commented that it was impossible that anyone in or near the village that day would have any knowledge of magic which might explain the event—nor even familiarity with the fact that magicians exist who perform tricks of this sort.[1]

True Story

One of the foremost exorcists of the twentieth century in America was Fr. Dominic Szymanski, OMC, DD, JUD. He is very hard on priests and bishops who, out of human respect, dissemble the Church's belief in the existence of the devil. On a widely circulated pamphlet, *Truth, About the Devil,* Fr. Szymanski writes:

> To curb the influence of Satan, Christ has given priests necessary powers—the powers of exorcism, but in our day they are buried deep in the ground for fear that sometime they may be used. The servant who buried his talent in the parable of the Gospel was called a "wicked, lazy servant" by the master, and he ordered him to be cast into "the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth." Every priest is an exorcist by virtue of his ordination. This power must be used, and used very extensively, with firmness and authority, otherwise the enemy creates havoc among the sheep of God.

Fr. Szymanski distinguishes between exorcism of the possessed and other exorcisms, most of which are not solemn and public. The latter, sprinkled through the blessings and sacramentals, show us that it is the mind of the Church that constant warfare be waged on the devil and demons. The influence of the devil is widespread, and so should be the

use of exorcism. Of diabolical possession he says, “Let no one think that possession cases are so rare that it is necessary to go back to the time of Christ to find one. There is no city, not even a single parish, free from cases of possession.” It is only in cases of diabolical possession that special and express permission of the Ordinary (bishop) is required, says the priest.

To illustrate a point about the effectiveness of exorcism, Fr. Szymanski cites a number of cases in which exorcism was successful. For instance:

> A certain priest in North Dakota was trying to introduce Perpetual Adoration into his parish, so that at no time during the day or night would the “Prisoner of the Tabernacle” be alone and unattended. His efforts aroused a storm of objections and criticism. Certain prominent members of the parish objected strenuously to the practice and loudly claimed that the parish existed for many years without it, that it was something unheard of, that no other parish practiced it, that the pastor should try to get the careless Catholics to practice their religion with a fair degree of regularity, and leave all that extraordinary piety to the cloistered nuns…
>
> The following Sunday the pastor announced to his people before the sermon that he was going to read a special blessing for them, composed by Leo XIII as an antidote against the powers of evil. He asked them to kneel down and join with him in prayer that the powers of evil be diminished, and that the blessing would extend to their homes, their farms, place of business, to the members of their families and friends. He then read the Leonine Exorcism from the *Rituale Romanum.*
>
> Immediately after the Mass several of those men who had opposed the introduction of the practice of Adoration into the parish pledged themselves to make hours of adoration, and use their influence with members of their families to do the same. All opposition to the practice of Adoration immediately disappeared. It is evident that the objections were overcome by eliminating the objector.[2]

True Story

> At the very beginning of the century (20th) Pope Leo XIII had just finished celebrating Mass at the Vatican one morning when he sank to the floor, as if in a faint. Several physicians came and searched for signs of life without success. Suddenly, the aged Pope opened his eyes and gasped, “What a dreadful vision was just given me!” He was given a prevision of the times to come: the mad attacks of the demons all over the world against the Church. Finally he saw the indescribable

face of the devil, Satan himself. But the Pope also saw the reassuring countenance of St. Michael the Archangel, and saw him cast Satan and his demons into hell. It was because of this vision that Pope Leo XIII composed his prayer of exorcism which older Catholics recall reciting after every low Mass on Sundays.[3]

The ministry of exorcism has never been an easy one for me. It is only God's grace that grants me the strength to keep going; the struggles and difficulties in this form of apostolate has me literally dragging my feet to respond to each and every request for assistance. There were a few times when I questioned why I was involved in this ministry. During those times, I just wanted to quit due to the difficulties involved especially when I was just beginning. It seemed that I bit more than I could chew. But remarkably, the Lord would timely send different people, at those precise moments who, without any inkling or knowing the internal struggles I was undergoing, would approach me and encouragingly tell me that the Lord was calling me to this form of ministry.

But despite the challenges, sufferings, and difficulties inherent in this type of ministry, I would, if given again the chance to return to the past, still make the same choice of getting involved in this ministry. It is truly a great privilege to witness firsthand the many miracles worked by the Lord in the lives of those who, with faith and trust, sought out his help. God is truly alive and at work in today's world!

My only regret is that there are so many sheep needing guidance and help but shepherds are truly wanting. I do hope and pray that more priests, religious, and also lay people respond to the call of the Lord to involve themselves in this ministry to answer the pleas of the growing number of people experiencing extraordinary demonic attacks.

When I was just beginning in this ministry, I had difficulty finding someone to guide and train me properly; and because of this, I experienced a deep sense of aloneness; seeing and experiencing a world that few people had any real idea of. It felt so weird and alienating that after encountering the demonic, to step out to the outside world where people continued with their usual day-to-day activities. Working in the seminary gave me the opportunity to ventilate sometimes to the seminarians this strange and at times, frightening dimension of my life. This sharing with them as well as with some others close to me kept me from developing a sort of post-traumatic stress syndrome. The intense negativity of the experiences that I was encountering seemed too heavy for my psyche!

It became a challenge for me to be aware of the good and the beautiful all around me. Encountering evil on a daily basis and in its most real and brutal form can cause a burnout to the most hardy of

individuals. The challenge for me then, during the early years in this ministry, was to find God in all of this; I had to draw from my formation in the seminary and from my few years as a priest, a truly living experience of God. An experience that would grant me the strength, the meaning, and the peace of heart in all that I was encountering.

These early years in the exorcism ministry allowed me to discover deficiencies in my relationship with God. I had, in a certain sense, focused more on the externals of my priestly ministry, so much so, that when I began to confront the demonic, my interior life that should have been my strength and support was found to be sadly wanting.

And because of this, I was burning out little-by-little especially through the constant barrage of demonic harassments and retaliations; even those close to me were targets of retaliations from the enemy.

I also discovered that I had difficulty praying for guidance and protection with deep faith and trust. My prayers then were mere lip service, filled with anxiety, doubt, and worry.

I became aware that all that knowledge about God in my head gained through my years studying theology had to reverberate in my heart! I had to allow God to be truly God in my life!

God, also during this time, was training me to shift my focus away from myself and my abilities and skills and focus entirely on him and his infinite power. He made me aware that without him, I was truly nothing in the spiritual war raging all around me and also that I would easily be defeated by the lowest of the fallen angels if I only brought myself to the battle.

Looking back, I discovered that God was allowing me to experience all these struggles and difficulties because he was developing in me a deeper relationship with him—an interior life that should always be the foundation of my ministry or for any ministry for that matter. It is God who fights and triumphs, never us.

And as he taught me little by little these lessons throughout my years of struggle, I gained more and more the strength and joy that allowed me to not only persevere in this ministry but also to have the zeal that I needed in forming the seminarians.

I learned little by little what it means to really get down on one's knees and pray humbly for strength as well as opening oneself up in humility and dependence, so that he could continually nourish us: body, emotions, and spirit. It was then that I truly realized that I was never alone in the ministry.

It was also then that I saw with my own eyes the infinite power of God, over the most powerful of the evil spirits; that truly everything was under his providential care, even the most seemingly hopeless cases.

Soon, the fears in my heart and the burden of confronting evil in my

ministry became almost non-existent. Yes, the ministry is still quite demanding and exhausting; but now, there is peace and joy borne out of the living relationship that I have with God, a relationship not only with the mind, but more so with the heart. Jesus' yoke is truly light.

These valuable learnings I could not have learned anywhere except through the spiritual combat inherent in this ministry. What I can say is that this apostolate is not an easy one, but the rewards are more than worth it.

Of course, my journey is not yet over. I had made mistakes in the past and still have more to learn especially in the development of my interior life; but I thank God that he has been so patient and compassionate, bestowing upon me blessings and graces which my small efforts do not deserve. As those in the exorcism and deliverance ministry will tell you, if one enters into it with a pure intention, one will joyfully discover what a great God we have who rewards a hundredfold way those who fight and struggle for him.

The Hidden Enemy

True Story

"I was warned about the devil."
Cathy C. Yamsuan
Inquirer, November 01, 2006

I had been warned that writing about the devil would not be a breeze. What I did not expect was how harrowing it would be, how emotionally draining, and how different from ordinary news coverage.

For a week, I was beset by depression that made me cry inexplicably. For two nights, my infant daughter suffered high fever that disappeared in the morning. I experienced three near-collisions with vehicles that appeared out of nowhere on my way to interview the exorcist-priest. And when I finally got to the San Carlos Seminary in Makati City, I learned that a "man in black" had told the guard at the seminary gate that the interview was cancelled because "the *Inquirer* reporter is not coming."

Fr. Jude Rebaldo, a friend and guest priest at the Resurrection of Our Lord Parish (ROLP), warned me before writing the story on exorcist Fr. Jose Francisco Syquia that the devil would do his best to discourage me. "What you will be doing is not an ordinary news report. You will expose the evil deeds of the devil. That is apostolic work and he will not like that," Rebaldo said.

Depression

My depression started in the afternoon I told the *Inquirer* news desk of my plan to cover Syquia's lecture at the Jesus the Divine Healer Parish in Tahanan Village, Parañaque City. I called my obstetrician, thinking it might be postpartum depression (I delivered my baby only four months ago). But my doctor said that if it were postpartum depression, it should have begun two months after delivery at the latest. "I will not prescribe anything to you. But maybe you can try counseling first. Why not see a priest?" Dr. Delfin Tan suggested. Initially, I was clueless about the connection between my depression and my plan to do a story on the exorcist.

I listened to Syquia's lecture on Oct. 14, but I needed more details. He said he would be free on Oct. 18, a Wednesday. In the wee hours of Wednesday morning, my baby had a 39-degree fever, which I found odd because she had just finished four bottles of antibiotics for her cough. Her fever went down at sunrise, so I went ahead with the interview. Going to San Carlos Seminary, my vehicle nearly collided with three separate vehicles at three different places in Makati. When I arrived, the seminary guard gave me a quizzical look but directed me to Syquia's office just the same. Jing de los Reyes, the priest's secretary, later told me about the "man in black" who did not identify himself and who disappeared as suddenly as he came.

Weird feeling

Right after my interview with Syquia, I had a weird and uneasy feeling that aggravated my depression. I phoned two priest-friends staying in the Makati area, hoping they could counsel me. Both were unavailable. I proceeded to the office nursing a queasy stomach, and managed to write two stories based on the interview with Syquia for *Inquirer Libre* before calling it a day. That night, Rebaldo of the ROLP received my confession. It was an impulsive move on my part; I felt it would bring me relief. It was then that the priest gave me the warning. After reciting the Act of Contrition before the church altar, I felt a heavy weight literally lifted off my shoulders. I wept in sheer relief. Still, my baby had another bout of high fever that night, which again disappeared the following morning.

Prayer of Deliverance

I called Rebaldo, who suggested that I recite the Prayer of Deliverance and ask for the protection of St. Michael, the archangel who fought

Lucifer. I immediately hauled my three children before our parish's Perpetual Adoration Chapel, recited the prayer, and sprinkled holy water over them and myself. Not satisfied, I did the same with their nannies. I felt immensely better soon after that. My children now wear blessed St. Benedict crosses, the ones used in exorcisms, on their chests. I also wear mine all the time, hidden inside my blouse. Before this experience, I prayed the rosary daily. But now I pray even harder, often asking St. Michael, Mama Mary, and the holy angels to protect my family.

During the last few decades, the Church saw a loss of emphasis and training in the ministry of exorcism. This was in a great part, due to progressive theologians who spread their heretical opinions that claimed that the devil and demons were mere symbolic figures in the Bible and that Jesus, when teaching about them, merely adapted himself to the culture of his time. Even today, some in the Church still believe this heresy. And because of this, many Catholics remain open and vulnerable to the hidden and subtle attacks of the devil and his cohorts; many, too, are never helped and either end up in a mental institution, commit suicide, or end up hurting others ("The devil made me do it!").

We must remember that Jesus always spoke the truth and he never altered the truth for whatever reason since he is the Truth. For example, in his discourses regarding himself being the Bread of Life, he said to those around him that he would literally be eaten by man and that only by consuming him would they have everlasting life. He never minced his words hence many of his disciples left because they lacked faith in him and could not take what he was saying.

Another example is when he spoke with the Samaritan woman in the well, asking for a drink of water. This was taboo in Jewish society—interacting with Samaritans and sharing the same utensils with them. It is an established fact that Jesus angered many who were proud and therefore spiritually blind in their interpretations because he always spoke the truth and never altered or adapted it in any way. If it was hard for his hearers to take, so be it; Jesus knew that those with sincere hearts would believe and, through their faith, find everlasting life. So if Jesus mentioned the reality of the devil and his demons, that is the truth. That is why the teaching of the Church regarding the devil has always been an article of faith (dogma) and one who chooses not to believe is a heretic.

The late Pope John Paul II told Fr. Gabriele Amorth, Vatican's chief exorcist, that if one does not believe in the existence of the devil, one also does not believe in the Gospel. The Pope himself prayed prayers of deliverance a number of times to free those being possessed by demons.

Anyone reading the history of the Church since its beginnings will discover the stark reality of the devil and his demons battling continuously the Body of Christ, the Church. Just a cursory reading of the lives of the saints will also point to this reality; these holy men and women of God were battling fallen angels left and right and continuously claiming victory over them. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is very clear on this topic in the existence of a personal being called the devil:

> Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy. Scripture and the Church's Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called "Satan" or the "devil." The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: "The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing" (CCC 391).

Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, on October 24, 1995, during the International Symposium organized by the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy, stated that:

> Preaching is connected with the "casting out of devils": it is a matter not just of speech but of effective action. And the preaching takes shape in no bright, happy world, but in a world tyrannized by demons, into which it (preaching) intervenes so as to liberate.

In the history of the Church, when the Gospel was proclaimed in all its purity and power, that is, without compromise to pagan and worldly belief systems, the devil always came out in the open to do battle. Hence, in the early Church and during those times in history when the greatest missionary activity of the Church occurred, possession and exorcism were at their height in both number and intensity. When evangelization is weak and conversion is minimal, the devil always keeps in the background, preferring to remain hidden so that he is never confronted and people do not become alarmed of his presence and seek security in God.

Here in our country, when zealous evangelization and its resultant authentic conversions start occurring, one can be sure that there will be a drastic rise of extraordinary demonic activity (obsession, oppression, and possession as well as infestations); the evil one would come out of hiding and battle openly for the souls and territories he believes are his.

How do we know that we are still in need of a zealous evangelization and conversion experience? Some signs are:

1. The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines calls for a renewed evangelization since according to studies, we are a people sacramentalized but not truly evangelized. This means that our animistic/pagan disposition which focuses on outward ritual and rites and the manipulation of power sources is still very much alive and this disposition is a major cause on why our faith has no connection with our daily lives. (The 3rd volume of the series will deal more with this reality.)

2. We find in our country, especially in the provinces, the intermingling of our faith with our pagan/animistic belief system. Sacramentals are used as amulets and talismans, novenas are not prayed but said as incantations (*orasyon*), statues of Buddha are placed side by side with the statues of the Sacred Heart, the Sto. Niño is treated like the *anitos* of old (for good luck in business, etc.), "superstitious practices" are practiced side by side with the sacraments and blessings of the Church, the Eucharist is seen as a source of power *mana* and is treated sacrilegiously, trance mediums and witch doctors are being possessed by "Jesus" or a "saint," blood is offered to spirits before constructing a house then having it blessed by a priest, people are worshiping God on Sunday and appeasing and calling upon nature spirits in everyday life (for example, before harvesting, undertaking a project, etc.), people are praying to God for healing then are seeking out faith healers and spiritists, churchgoers are relying on fortune-tellers rather than on God's providence and so on and so forth. We can be sure that once these animistic/pagan practices are obliterated, there will be a drastic rise in extraordinary demonic activity!

   Now, the reader will be surprised to know that our office (Archdiocese of Manila Office of Exorcism) has a substantial number of cases of Sisters from different congregations who come to us due to extraordinary demonic attacks and harassments. The cause is usually a past involvement of their family or they themselves (before entering the religious life) in the occult; usually these Sisters come from the provinces.

   The devil and his demons, right before these Sisters make their vows or begin a more earnest offering of themselves to the Lord, attack openly especially through oppression (nightly physical attacks that even cause wounds, persistent tiredness without any cause, obsessive thoughts during prayer, physical ailments which cannot be diagnosed, paranormal occurrences like "ghostly sightings" and the like). The attached demons are drawn out in the open and react overtly because they are constantly tortured due to

the ever-deepening relationship of the soul with God. It is only then that the bondages created by dabbling with the occult in the past become apparent. If these Sisters did not enter religious life, these evil spirits would remain attached, causing all kinds of temptations, addictions, and difficulties (physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual). But fortunately because these Sisters already have a deep relationship with the Lord, what is usually needed on their part is a sincere renouncement of their occult activities plus confession of them. Usually only one session of deliverance is needed for total liberation; then all extraordinary demonic harassments and blockages abruptly end.

The sad thing is that in our country there are so many who are still dabbling in the occult (going deeper into it each day) and they never give a second thought about God; I shudder to think of the deep bondages they are creating with the devil and the many openings in their lives which they are presenting to him; I shudder to think of their future.

3. A final point that I would like to stress regarding the need in our country of a more zealous evangelization is that we are the only predominantly Catholic country in Asia yet we are one of the poorest, most violent, and most corrupt countries among our neighbors. There seems to be no connection with our faith and our day-to-day life. This again is our unpurified animistic/pagan past still very much alive despite years of being Catholic; our animistic disposition is hidden under Catholic trappings. Just as during the Old Testament, when Israel was contaminated by the idolatrous pagan practices of their neighbors, the Lord's protection was withdrawn; in our country, if we do not purify our faith from our idolatrous worship practices found in folk religiosity and the New Age movement, and zealously strive to connect our faith with our way of life then we ourselves will continually block the graces and blessings of God.

When you come into the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate the abominations of the peoples there. Let there not be found among you anyone who immolates his son or daughter in the fire, nor a fortune-teller, soothsayer, charmer (witch), a diviner (astrology, geomancy, Feng Shui), or caster of spells, nor one who consults ghosts and spirits (spiritists, séances) or seeks oracles from the dead. Anyone who does such things is an abomination to the Lord, and because of such abominations the Lord, your God, is driving these nations out of your way (Dt 18:9-12).

In the 7th book of Revelations, Mama Mary told St. Bridget of Sweden:

> Many men and women, with various inordinate marks of respect, keep about them and consult wicked fortune-tellers and diviners and the most evil of enchantresses. For sometimes they ask them to perform witchcraft and incantations in order that they may be able to conceive and beget children. Others require them to perform incantations and to make fetishes that will cause certain men and women, or even their temporal lords, to be enamored of them to the point of distraction and to love them with all their heart (*gayuma*). Others, in fact, beg foreknowledge (fortune-tellers) of the future from these same accursed witches. Many others ask them to give them health (*albularyos,* faith healers) in their infirmities through their art of enchantment and witchcraft. All indeed who keep these same warlock diviners or enchantresses in their households and at their own expense and all who seek from such people such wicked advice and diabolic remedies, and, indeed, all those same warlock diviners and enchantresses who promise the things mentioned above—all are cursed and hateful in the sight of God. As long as they persevere in such a state and purpose, no infusion or grace of the Holy Spirit will ever descend or enter into their hearts. But nevertheless, if they repent and humbly amend their lives with the true purpose of not falling back again, they will obtain grace and mercy from my Son.

It must be remembered that when dabbling with the occult whether for healing, fortune-telling, divination, communicating with the "dead" and other-dimensional beings (like aliens, elementals, spirit guides, and ascended masters), good luck, protection and the like, one is dealing with powers that are not of God as seen in the many Old Testament warnings of Yahweh to Israel. When one invokes these powers and call upon their services, a bond or link is created—a sort of right of the evil spirit over the soul (the devil never gives for free).

In our office (Archdiocese of Manila Office of Exorcism), we have cases wherein people become victims of extraordinary demonic attack when they return to God after they discover that they have been deceived by the devil into dangerous activities and lifestyles; we see this most especially in those who have been deeply involved in occult/ esoteric activities. It is only when they try to leave these activities that they discover how vulnerable they are now to the open fury of the devil.

They become victims of all kinds of psychic attacks on the body (physical pains especially in the head and stomach, a draining tiredness, inability to sleep nightly, sexual attacks that occur even during the day),

emotions (depression or, intense sadness/anger), and on the mind (violent, obscene "psychotic," and suicidal thoughts).

Although this is difficult for them, it is also a blessing because they are awakened to know where they would have ended up if they continued their lifestyle; but more than this is that they turn to the Lord and are healed and delivered; the true fulfillment, peace, and joy that they so longed for and searched for are given to them through the love that God showers on them and in a degree, that they have never hoped for. All areas of their lives receive great blessings and graces from God.

The devil who desires to remain hidden always, and attacks in the shadows like a coward will only be drawn to the open when he is discovered and his right over a person or place is challenged! He will only manifest his true nature when his deceptions and lies are uncovered. This was how he confronted our Lord: first in a subtle and shrewd manner in the desert and when he failed, he attacked openly with all his hatred which we see in the events of the passion of our Lord. Of course, despite those overt attacks, the devil was defeated and humiliated.

With regard to the saints, the devil would usually show his true form to them like to St. Jean Marie Vianney, St. Padre Pio, St. Francis of Assisi, St. John Bosco, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Ignatius of Loyola, etc. because he knew that they would see through his disguise even if he came as an angel of light or other benign being; but for us, who can be easily deceived, he usually comes in many supposedly innocent forms like white dwarves, white ladies, alien beings, fairies, a departed loved one, a soul of a national hero even as Mama Mary and Jesus himself, especially the Sto. Niño.

Without the guidance of the Church and the Holy Spirit alive and active in our hearts, we could easily be fooled because the devil is much more intelligent and cunning than the most ingenious criminal mind. This is the reason why it takes the Church many years in discerning the growing number of apparitions of our Lady especially during the last century. Closer to our own time, it was only after many years that the writings of St. Faustina Kowalska, through the hard work and laborious study of the late Pope John Paul II, were proven to be from our Lord himself and thus the Devotion to the Divine Mercy was only then formally established.

Jesus founded the Church to make sure that we will always be guided and remain in the truth; he has given the Church the authority, through the Holy Spirit, to discern and bring to the light what is in the dark, to bring out in the open the reality of this hidden enemy and the guerilla war he is waging against the children of God. Once all this is out in the open, then the Lord equips his children with the weapons of light, in

order to do battle, totally defeat, and expel this enemy of mankind from our midst.

For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens (Eph 6:12).

Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour. Resist him, steadfast in faith (1 Peter 5:8-9a).

The Church Awakens

News Brief

Pope's exorcist squads will wage war on Satan *Evening Standard*, London

Satanism on the rise: Pope Benedict has unveiled plans to set up specialist exorcism squads

The Pope has ordered his bishops to set up exorcism squads to tackle the rise of Satanism.

Vatican chiefs are concerned at what they see as an increased interest in the occult.

They have introduced courses for priests to combat what they call the most extreme form of "Godlessness."

Each bishop is to be told to have in his diocese a number of priests trained to fight demonic possession.

The initiative was revealed by 82-year-old Father Gabriele Amorth, the Vatican "exorcist-in-chief," to the online Catholic news service Petrus.

"Thanks be to God, we have a Pope who has decided to fight the Devil head-on," he said.

"Too many bishops are not taking this seriously and are not delegating their priests in the fight against the Devil. You have to hunt high and low for a properly trained exorcist."

"Thankfully, Benedict XVI believes in the existence and danger of evil—going back to the time he was in charge of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith." The CDF is the oldest Vatican department and was headed by Benedict XVI from 1982, when he was Cardinal Ratzinger, until he became Pope in 2005.

Father Amorth said that during his time at the department Benedict had not lost the chance to warn humanity of the risk from the Devil.

He said the Pope wants to restore a prayer seen as protection against evil that was traditionally recited at the end of Catholic

Masses. The prayer, to St. Michael the Archangel, was dropped in the 1960s by Pope John XXIII.

"The prayer is useful not only for priests but also for lay people in helping to fight demons," he said.

Father Paolo Scarafoni, who lectures on the Vatican's exorcism course, said that interest in Satanism and the occult has grown as people lost faith with the Church.

He added: "People suffer and think that turning to the Devil can help solve their problems. We are being bombarded by requests for exorcisms."

The Vatican is particularly concerned that young people are being exposed to the influence of Satanic sects through rock music and the Internet.

In theory, under the Catholic Church's Canon Law 1172, all priests can perform exorcisms. But in reality only a select few are assigned the task.

Under the law, practitioners must have "piety, knowledge, prudence, and integrity of life."

The rite of exorcism involves a series of gestures and prayers to invoke the power of God and stop the "demon" influencing its victim.

During my last trip to Rome, I met Fr. Gabriele Nanni, an exorcist from Rome and a lecturer at the course on Exorcism and Deliverance at the Pontifical University, Regina Apostolorum. He worked in the Sacra Romana Rota (the top legal tribunal in the Vatican) and has published a doctoral thesis on exorcism.

The Archdiocese of Manila Office of Exorcism invited him to give a talk to priests and religious at San Carlos Major Seminary, Makati City last December 4, 2007. It was there that he made this very astonishing statement regarding the prevalence of possession cases today; he mentioned that if you were to gather a group of about 3,000 people, the number of those who would be demonically possessed would be around 20 persons!

Of course, he would be speaking more here of those who are demonically in bondage but do not normally realize the extent of their bondage. These people do not exhibit the patterns of the crisis state of the possessed, unless the power of God draws out into the open the evil spirits attached. Then and only then would the profound degree of their bondage to the evil one be made manifest.

Those in the Catholic Charismatic Movement know this phenomenon all too well when they hold Life in the Spirit Seminars. When the power of the Holy Spirit comes in contact with the evil one in a person, if the demonic bondage is great, there can occur bizarre reactions in the

victim, reactions seen only in a possessed person who is in a crisis state.

I remember a time when I attended a session in a large chapel when after the Mass, the exorcist prayed a deliverance prayer over the people; suddenly all around the hall, people started reacting bizarrely and there were some manifestations of a paranormal nature. I remember with a smile, how the uninterested and almost irreverential mood of the people, who were just waiting to go home, totally changed into an unexpected seriousness and nervous solemnity.

In my own experience, cases sent to our office with what seem to be only a medical malady would react bizarrely and even violently when we solemnly prayed prayers of deliverance over them. After these prayers, they would be healed of their psychological and physiological problems. Of course, this was only done after a thorough evaluation using Church-proven means to diagnose the presence of extraordinary demonic bondage.

It is of utmost importance to always discern seemingly spiritual problems and phenomena within the context of the Church's teachings; there can be real spiritual and even physical difficulties and dangers involved if one does not recognize the true from the false and the good from the evil.

Returning to this ongoing spiritual war, society itself has to be reminded again of it because it has very grave consequences in our world today. Our present Pope, Benedict XVI, while attending a seminar (The Ecclesial Movements in the Pastoral Concern of the Bishops) in June of 1999, said to a group of bishops, regarding the devil: he "is always at work… instigating untold cruelties, as unfortunately seen throughout the twentieth century." The Pope himself tells us that the many evils in today's world are not merely the result of man's fallen nature but have a source that is truly evil. And the sad thing is that it is we ourselves, who have given power to these fallen angels through our sins and occult/esoteric practices (which invoke them).

We may liken our present world with the soul of a person who lives in the state of some sin and compare it with that of a holy person; the devil has easy access to the former and has difficulty with the latter. When a sinner continues sinning, his sins become graver, more addictive, and affect other areas of his character and even his relationships. Evil spirits are attracted to evil and sin. They aggravate these maladies where they find these realities, and they now latch on to this person, making the person obstinate and hardened in his evil lifestyle. They also blind him so that he may not see where his soul will ultimately end up after death. He also becomes a walking source of division, difficulty, and suffering to those around him, hence people avoid him like the plague.

If we now adapt this image to a house, a home where the members of

the family foster the wrong types of "values," there would reach a point wherein all the discord, anger, and suffering experienced would attract more and more evil spirits who, then aggravate the situation so much so that the family seems not to be able to get any better even with counseling and family therapy. We see instead a growing hardness in the hearts of the members and obstinacy in their pride and wrong attitudes. As more and more evil spirits gravitate around this depressing and deteriorating situation, the family then experiences all kinds of additional problems: addictions, suicidal tendencies, violence, depression, loss of financial stability, sicknesses, and all other types of "bad luck." The sad thing here is that the family members may even blame God for their lot without seeing the true cause of their difficulties and the true blocks to his blessings in their lives.

And worse of all, if the family seeks aid from occult/esoteric practitioners, the situation deteriorates rapidly. Anyone entering such a home would immediately sense the depressing atmosphere and dark mood of the place. At this point, the evil spirits in a sense rule this house and manipulates the members in many varied and unseen ways. If the spirits infesting the place reaches a certain large number, the house can easily become what we may call "haunted." This kind of house is more common than one would think; our office has dealt with such houses. I again remember the story of Archbishop Socrates Villegas, told to me when I was still a neophyte in the ministry; he narrated to me blessing one such house; afterwards his arm remained stiff for a week but peace and joy replaced the evil atmosphere in the home.

On the other hand, a demon has difficulty entering and harassing a home with prayerful and virtuous Catholics close to God, Mama Mary, the other saints, and the angels. Of course, with regard to some saints like St. Jean Marie Vianney, St. Padre Pio, and St. John Bosco, God permitted paranormal disturbances in their homes to allow them to gain even greater merit and reward when they enter heaven.

Now, using both images of the soul and the home we now apply the situation to the world where so much violence and evil are now occurring; where the occult is now replacing the declining faith in Europe and the Americas; where the New Age Movement with all its occult and esoteric practices are infiltrating even Church communities; where Satanism is now a recognized religion and fast growing as well as witchcraft and sorcery; where folk religiosity with its idolatrous practices exists side by side with the faith; where killing the unborn has now reached the millions; where many false religions, cults, and sects are deceiving thousands of Christians (here in our country, cults and sects like the Born Again Christians and the Iglesia ni Cristo are using lies and hate tactics to destroy the faith of Catholics who have only a

more or less grade 1 education about their faith without Catholic shepherds actively combating these wolves in sheep's clothing, just like what the saints in former times always did); where the materialist and consumerist mentality of the world of money, power, and position is espoused even by Catholic families over holiness of life; where sin is not seen anymore as sin; where abject poverty exists side by side with the abundant surplus of others; where pornography is viewed as art, and so on and so forth. We can clearly see why the devil and his minions have so much influence and power and dominion today.

This gives us an idea why the Church is now becoming more and more alarmed with the increase of demonic activity all around the globe; we ourselves in today's world have given this power to the devil and his minions.

Our present Pope warns us of the gathering and strengthening of the devil and his fallen followers in today's world. Even in the mid-'80s the present Pope made us aware of this growing threat that would have an effect on his pontificate; he states that "there are already signs of the return of these dark powers, and Satanic cults are spreading more and more in the secularized world."[4]

Cases of possession and oppression declined during the early and Middle Ages when the world was permeated with the values of the Gospel (it had also eradicated most pagan idolatrous practices); and when the Church was still the center of society. Those were the days when God, Mama Mary, the saints, and angels were so much a part of the day-to-day life of the people, most especially in Europe.

But, as stated, with the rise of sin and evil, materialism, secularism, and New Age and occult/esoteric beliefs and practices, there is today the parallel rise of extraordinary demonic activity.

"Almost all exorcists are unanimous in their belief… that more people are becoming possessed today than in the recent past."[5]

"According to the Association of Italian Catholic Psychiatrists and Psychologists, in Italy alone, more than 500,000 people see an exorcist annually."[6]

It is such that the alarming number of these occurrences was seldom seen in the history of the Church, with the exception of the time of Christ, the growth of the early Church in Rome, and when missionaries evangelized pagan territories like the New World and China.

Because of this growing concern, the Church, through the leadership of Pope Benedict XVI is stepping up measures to address this growing challenge by teaching, training, and assigning specialists in this form of warfare.

A good number of exorcists are being trained yearly through regular courses and seminars in Rome. The yearly course on the ministry of

exorcism and deliverance is attended by hundreds of priests and seminarians with a sprinkling of lay people. In addition, these new exorcists gain much needed experience under the tutelage of the few and old veteran exorcists who have remained faithful to the ministry handed down by Christ.

There is also today the existence of the International Association of Exorcists with Fr. Gabriele Amorth as founder and honorary president; this is a somewhat secretive (to avoid media sensationalism) and elite (veteran) group of exorcists who meet once a year to discuss relevant topics in the ministry. When I first attended this large gathering in an undisclosed area outside of Rome to avoid media intrusion, and though I was already 40 at the time, I seemed like a minor seminarian compared to these wizened men of God. Most of them wore habits, meaning, they were religious and not diocesan priests and many were grandfatherly in their features. Actually, to me a number of them looked like St. Padre Pio.

I felt out of place and uncomfortable because of my youthful appearance, but no one seemed to notice this. These exorcists went about their ways in a gentle and meek manner although sometimes, they were high-spirited (most were Italians) when they spoke among themselves.

What a privilege it was to meet the most holy and experienced exorcists of the Church all packed in one place. It was Fr. Gabriele Amorth, Vatican's chief exorcist, with the assistance of the other officers of the association, who presided and facilitated the sessions during the entire week of the conference.

When I first attended, there were more than a hundred of them in attendance. This was a good sign since a few decades back, it would be almost a miracle to find such a number even in the whole of Europe itself.

The auditorium was modern and spacious with a platform in front where Fr. Amorth and the other officers of the association sat. When the session started, I had quite a hard time catching up since the language used was technical Italian. During breaks, I was dismayed to discover that all the books being sold outside the hall were also in Italian. Anyway, I bought a few with the more interesting titles, hoping that my limited Italian would suffice. Luckily, when I returned to Manila, a Sister assigned to the office, Sr. Lei FMA, was fluent in Italian and helped to translate the books.

I vividly remember the opening sharing given by a religious priest; he mentioned his case wherein the head of the possessed turned a full 360 degrees around (as seen in the movie, *The Exorcist*). That really set the mood of the entire seminar for me. The talks were formal in character

which included, from the more secular circle, lectures from a criminologist and a psychiatrist, and from the clerical circle, there were lectures from a liturgist and a canon lawyer. There was a lot of open forum afterwards.

Aside from the International Association of Exorcists, there is also the International Association of Deliverance (created in 1995) spearheaded by the well-known Catholic charismatic priest, Fr. Rufus Pereira which began with 135 members. Here the focus is more on healing and deliverance using the charismatic gifts and many priests and lay persons are learning about these ministries and receiving training through this association.

It is therefore important that we in the Church relearn and update ourselves in the ministry of healing and deliverance/exorcism. It is both a corporal and spiritual work of mercy that has been tasked to us by Christ and handed down in his Church throughout its 2,000-year history. Let us remember that those who are victims of demonic assaults and bondages are included in those called the "poorest of the poor."

The ministries of healing, deliverance, and exorcism are means by which we can truly share in the mission of Christ, his love and compassion for the poor, and his authority and victory over the powers of darkness. If Jesus were walking on the earth today, he, because of his compassion and mercy, would be healing and expelling evil spirits left and right.

During the first months of his papacy, Pope Benedict XVI said to a group of exorcists meeting in Italy for their annual convention, "I encourage you to pursue your important ministry in the service of the Church sustained by the vigilant attention of your bishops and the unending prayer of the Christian community."

And in his latest book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, the Pope tells us:

> The first task is preaching: to give people the light of the word, the message of Jesus… because the world is ruled by the powers of evil, this preaching is at the same time a struggle with those powers.
>
> Who could fail to see here a description of our world as well, in which the Christian is threatened by an anonymous atmosphere, by "something in the air" that wants to make the faith seem ludicrous and absurd to him? And who could fail to see the poisoning of the spiritual climate all over the world that threatens the dignity of man, indeed his very existence? The individual human being, and even communities of human beings, seem so hopelessly at the mercy of such powers. The Christian knows that he cannot master this threat by his own resources alone.

So the clear mind of the Church is that the devil and his fallen minions are real and they are waging a war for souls.

Sadly, many in the Church still overlook these number one enemies of humanity and are therefore ignorant about their tactics and plans of destruction for them. And because of this, no defenses are set up; no preparation and engagement of the enemy are done as the battle rages all around them. Just ask how many Catholics still use the sacramentals of the Church like holy water and wear religious medals, how many pray to St. Michael and one's guardian angel for guidance and protection, how many pray prayers of protection and deliverance, how many, when they fall into mortal sin, seek right away a priest for confession to keep their souls protected from evil spirits latching on to them?

Today, as was mentioned, the devil's greatest lie is to deceive people that he does not exist and that there is no such war going on for souls. This, of course, brings about complacency and indifference towards one's soul. Many risks are therefore taken with it and many openings are created in the person so that he becomes an easy prey to the devil. No wonder, many end up in demonic bondage through all kinds of occult/esoteric activities; since there is no belief in the devil, there is no need to discern where all these powers of the occult originate from.

Science alone will never be able to detect these most cunning of creatures especially because the realm of science is centered only on the material universe; it has no tools or instruments to detect evil spirits much less resolve problems in the spiritual realm. It is sad when you hear some academicians, just because science cannot say anything about the devil, already make the dangerous assumption that he does not exist. In our own limited life, we believe the reality of so many things even though we have never directly seen, heard, felt, smelled, or tasted them; for example, bacteria, a country we have not been to, our great, great, great grandparents, our soul, love, etc.

True Story

Here is an account from Fr. John J. Nicola, a priest well-versed in demonology and who was the technical consultant of the movie, *The Exorcist.*

> Not long ago a psychiatrist friend of mine, for whom I have the greatest respect and whom I frequently confer with, told an interesting story. He had been discussing with one of his colleagues about the possibility of diabolical possession in a certain case. The other man found this unthinkable. A few weeks afterwards the latter

was visiting a patient in a ward at the nearby state hospital. In this ward were a number of psychotic patients, potentially violent, who at the time were very subdued. Some were asleep, others were walking about distractedly; the doctor was speaking with his patient. When a man neatly dressed in a business suit, white shirt, and tie walked through the ward, "all hell suddenly broke loose"! The patients who were asleep woke up, those who were walking about became belligerent and boisterous, and the help of orderlies had to be solicited to restrain them. After the calm had been restored, the psychiatrist asked a nurse, "Who was that man who walked through here before?" The reply was that it was a priest carrying the Blessed Sacrament to patients in the next ward. This caused him to have second thoughts about the possibility of diabolical possession. Now that our society has rejected the inhumane and cruel treatment of all mentally ill patients as being possessed of demons, a reaction has set in, making it unfashionable for the enlightened to believe in demons and demonic possession. It could be a case of throwing out the baby with the bath water.

Another point I would like to stress is that this greatest enemy of mankind is mentioned thousands of times in the Bible yet rarely do we hear his evil presence being addressed today. What a deception! We must remember that almost every other page in the Gospel is an encounter between Jesus and the devil; the evangelists would never have mentioned these occurrences many times if they were not relevant for us in the Church even today.

The time of miracles is not ended; I have seen miracles many times in my ministry of exorcism, miracles not only of deliverance but also of healing. I am so impressed by the witnessing of a contemplative religious superior who, after having read my first book on exorcism, prays deliverance prayers over afflicted souls who come to her for prayers and are instantly delivered from their demonic afflictions, so much so that many now come to her for help. I am also mildly surprised when seminarians who have been under me pray over persons who ask them for prayers whether they be sick or afflicted by demonic oppression, and are healed or liberated. Christ has given all his disciples the authority to heal and expel spirits; if we but learn to pray with faith and not with doubt, anxiety, or fear, then and only then will we truly fulfill the injunction of Christ to bring the power of his Kingdom to all.

When they came to the crowd a man approached, knelt down before him, and said, "Lord, have pity on my son, for he is a lunatic and suffers severely; often he falls into fire, and often into water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him." Jesus said in reply, "O faithless and perverse

generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you? Bring him here to me." Jesus rebuked him and the demon came out of him, and from that hour the boy was cured. Then the disciples approached Jesus in private and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. Amen, I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Mt 17:14-20).

Let us always remember that Jesus desires to heal and deliver his people from the clutches of the evil one, today as much as during his sojourn on this earth; Jesus is the same today, yesterday, and tomorrow. The question I now ask all priests is this, "Are we willing to be Christ's instruments in today's world or are we going to allow our people to die of hunger and thirst for the power of God because we do not see and believe in the authority that is ours through our priesthood?" The full authority God has given to Christ during his public ministry (mediating, healing, preaching, expelling the fallen angels, etc.) is the very same authority given to us, priests, at ordination. We must have faith and full confidence in this in order to use this same authority to tear down demonic strongholds and bring the power and blessings of God to his people today.

It is also our duty, as priests, to speak to the people of the facts which they may not desire to hear or have the sensibilities to listen to in this very secular world such as the cross, hell, purgatory, Satan and demons. We, as priests, are not entertainers of the flock but are Christ's mouthpieces speaking the words of the Lord, words that can sometimes become the two-edged sword that sifts the wheat from the weeds.

Jesus spoke about these realities because they were and still are of primary importance in our journey towards God; all the saints have spoken about these difficult topics; we, priests of today, must continue to speak about them. It may not only be unpleasant to our listeners but also to our own ears as well but as the Lord's representatives and mediators, we have the duty to speak the whole truth of the Gospel in and out of season; woe to us if we remain silent when we should have spoken out. Let us be true shepherds of the flock whatever the cost.

Doing battle with evil spirits, I know, will never be easy for me, but I have only one life and only one chance in eternity to fight for souls and glorify my God in this battle of battles! This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity which will never be offered to me again.

Today may seem to be the worst of times, with all the evil and violence around us; but in actuality, for the followers of Jesus, this is also the best of times since we in Jesus' Name can offer so much to him as we combat and defeat the devil and his minions and destroy his strongholds around us. May we, priests, religious, and laity fight the

good fight to the end.

PART I

A Personal Journey

With the Name of Jesus we shall overthrow the demons; we shall put them to flight. With this Name, if they dare to attack us, our battles will be victorious…

—St. John Mary Vianney

Dear God! Even in ascending the altar I experience these attacks [of the enemy], but I have Jesus with me, and what should I fear?

—St. Padre Pio

Receiving Jesus for the first time

CHAPTER I

Beginnings

True Story

Perspiration was slowly forming on my face as I struggled with almost all of my strength to try to pin down the right arm of a 14-year-old frail and lanky girl who was lying on the floor of the makeshift chapel. She was convulsing violently. Holding the other trembling arm was a doctor, who was part of the team, pinning it down, while the legs of the girl were being held down with difficulty by my brother, Joel. As I turned to check the body of the girl which was being held down by a male companion of the girl, I was stunned to see that despite the strength and size of the man, he could not keep the upper body of the girl in place. Her upper torso was lifting itself up without any aid from either her arms or legs; this was physiologically impossible! We had to hold the girl down otherwise she would literally slither away from us like an escaping snake. I looked at my companion-exorcist, who was leading the prayers from the Roman Ritual of Exorcism; his face was serious and solemn as his loud and booming voice broke through the screams and moans of the girl. Beside him was another exorcist priest who answered the Latin responses to the prayers; he was a young priest, even younger than I and was holding in his right hand a relic of a saint. As the older priest's voice continued to barrage the spirits within the girl, the girl's body desperately tried to kick itself loose. Suddenly I witnessed both her thrashing legs break free and I saw Joel quickly and nimbly jump out of the way of an explosive double flying kick directed at his body; he then instantly tackled and grabbed again with perfect timing both flailing legs. Our eyes met at that moment with the same thought, "Whew! That was close!" I remembered my brother desiring with excitement to join the Office of Exorcism as a volunteer lawyer years back; his stern and serious eyes today manifested that those early days of seeming adventure seemed so long ago. He himself had experienced with me a lot with regard to actual spiritual warfare and he was one of the few

persons years back from whom I could find support especially when the going got tough.

I remember that when I was starting out in this ministry, I always felt, deep within me a certain vague loneliness; this was because I was experiencing things others could not seem to understand and help me with. I saw, felt, and struggled with powers that I had not learned adequately about during my seminary formation years. I had to fit these bizarre and uncanny experiences with my rational and sanitized worldview and training. My ideas of being a priest were changed forever because of these experiences; I discovered firsthand a war that few knew about but which St. Paul mentions is the real war.

"For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens" (Eph 6:12).

But this time, I was not alone; I was with a team. This team was composed of members from the Archdiocese of Manila Office of Exorcism or AMOE for short.

As the frail girl continued to struggle violently and go into spasms, I was happy and contented to let my two companion priests do the bombarding of the demons using the Roman Ritual of Exorcism; I, on the other hand, concentrated on checking even the mildest reactions of the possessed to the prayers and the other sacramentals used. The older Franciscan priest, Fr. Mateo, was the Archdiocese's chief exorcist and I relied heavily on his holiness to see us through the more difficult cases. The younger priest, Fr. Jojo, was a newer member of the team but had already experienced a number of cases of extraordinary demonic activity before joining AMOE. Although from another diocese, he volunteered to help us in the office; aside from pastoral reasons, he joined the office so that he may gain more experience in this special form of ministry. This day, aside from the three of us exorcists, the team included my brother Joel, a volunteer doctor and the coordinator of the Office. Aside from the team, there were also present the girl's companions, two women and a man.

Minutes passed by quickly. While struggling to keep the one arm of the girl pinned to the floor as well as quietly trying to remain focused, I noticed Fr. Jojo applying casually his relic of the True Cross on the girl's forehead; her reaction was instantaneous and explosive. We, surrounding the girl, did all our best to secure the more violent preternatural displays of strength from her and the screams that emanated from her throat were of anger and pain. And then ever so slowly, the entire body of the possessed started to become rigid and catatonic. Little by little her hands started to form claws and her fingers started to dig deeply into the flesh of her palms. I grabbed the exorcised oil and applied it on both her palms which started to shake and jerk violently as though they were being burned. Then as we all

looked on, her chest started to rise, ever so slowly until her back has formed a perfect and rigid arch. Only her head this time was supporting her entire upper torso. My companions noticed this astonishing display of acrobatics but remained silent. I looked at that perfect arch and remember that this has always been a pattern seen in possessed cases down the centuries. Like a zealous detective, I quietly asked the doctor to raise her closed eyelids; a person who is in a state of total possession would have his/her eyes rolled back so far that only the whites of the eyes would be seen. And just as I was expecting, the doctor told me in a hushed tone that her eyes were totally white. Minutes ticked by and the team was quickly getting drained due to the intensity of the struggle.

Fr. Mateo was still commanding the spirits when Fr. Jojo brought out his exorcism crucifix and positioned it a few inches in front of the girl's contorted face. He then started to bless her with it. It was then that one of my companions witnessed something that shook her and which she would always remember. As Fr. Jojo was blessing, the girl, even with her eyes closed, started to follow with her head the movements of the crucifix. It was like what one sees, in animal documentaries, where a cobra poised to strike would follow with its head, every movement of its adversary or prey. And then with eyes still closed, she suddenly tried to grab the crucifix but the priest was quicker and was able to pull it back before the girl could reach it.

The head of the girl started violently to turn away from the Cross as Fr. Jojo tried repeatedly to position it in front of her face (her eyes still tightly closed). I looked at the team and the companions of the girl, I saw that everyone was participating in his own way, some were praying while the others were actively taking part in physically restraining the possessed.

The girl, on the other hand, continued to moan and scream alternately. Fr. Mateo continued with the barrage of prayers, his clear strong voice resounding on the walls of the chapel. Then after a while longer the girl started little by little, to calm down and slowly come out of her possessed trance state. We all started to back off a bit, seeing that the consciousness of the girl was slowly beginning to return. This occurrence of the person slowly returning to consciousness points to the fact that the evil spirits have been weakened and are retreating, for the moment.

"This would be a good time for a break," I told myself, knowing full well that we were all emotionally and physically drained after almost an hour of struggle. I signaled one of the members, Jing, to test first if the consciousness that we were seeing emerge was truly that of the girl. Jing told her to repeat the words, "I love you, Jesus." She mouthed the first few words and everything was fine until she reached the last word, Jesus. She could not say the word, Jesus, and started again to become agitated. Everyone was on edge again and we waited tensely while Jing expertly and

gently led the girl to concentrate on saying the words. After what seemed like an eternity with everyone anxiously watching, she finally completed the entire sentence and regained total consciousness. There was a general sigh of relief. We then left the patient with her companions so we could gather for discernment and deliberation at the far end of the large makeshift chapel. While we were going to a more relaxed mode, no one of us could realize that the worse was still to come…

(To be continued on Chapter XI)

May 1989

I was climbing the cold and hard steps, to the top floor of the building, carrying a quite heavy bag filled with my clothes. Behind me were my mother and my aunt also carrying some other pieces of my belongings. It was dark outside and this did not help the eeriness I felt as I surveyed the huge halls and the high ceiling of the aging seminary. But deep within me, there was a bubbling excitement as I told myself that this was the beginning of a great adventure. A journey to get to know more about God and to serve him with my whole life, the start of a lifetime journey to become like the heroic saints of old. After some time we finally reached my assigned cubicle on the third floor. It was located almost in the center of one side of a dark cavernous hall. The weak overhead lighting did nothing to dissipate this gloominess of the place. I already knew the location of my room since some of the newly accepted first year seminarians and I had come earlier for a few days to clean and prepare our quarters before the beginning of the new school year. As I reached my room, I became aware that the other seminarians had not yet arrived. The large hallway was dark except for a few pockets of light from the fluorescent lamps situated in one wing of the hall; the atmosphere though was tranquil and quiet. I opened the door and let my mom and aunt in; the room was sparse but clean; there was the green spring bed with metal T-bars for the mosquito netting, a dark brown solid desk with a similar looking chair, an open closet built into the wooden wall, a low dark brown bookshelf, and a crucifix nailed to the light green colored wall. There were no electrical sockets; all kinds of electrical appliances were not allowed. That meant no bringing of radios, personal lamps, electric fans, or the like. I was happy and contented knowing full well that this was part of the rigorous training to become a future leader of the Church. But in my aunt's mind, doubts were forming whether I would be happy much less survive in this austere setting.

My always efficient mother went quickly to work fixing up my room; I

tried to help with the small stuff as best as I could. While she was cleaning the shelves and arranging my clothes on top of some old newspapers placed on the shelves of the open closet, the priest director of the department, unnoticed by us, was just outside the door surveying the entire scene. When I noticed his silent and stern presence, I thought, "Oh no! He might think I'm a Mama's boy!" The accuracy of my perception would be proven true a short time later.

I introduced my mother and my aunt to the bespectacled priest. They entered into some lively small talk with the priest until before long, it was time for them to leave. I said my farewells to my mom and aunt and then returned to where this now serious priest was standing. He and I were alone since the other seminarians assigned to my floor had not yet arrived. He was looking at me with a sort of sinister stare. "Oh, Oh!" He then told me matter-of-factly, "Gather up all your belongings. I have a much better room for you, a much larger one." I obediently but dejectedly collected the clothes that my mother had so just painstakingly arranged. I hauled as much of my belongings as my two arms could carry and followed my director from behind.

He stopped abruptly in front of the last room along the large and dark hallway and solemnly turned to me and said that this would be my new room. As I peered in, I thought to myself, "I thought that this would be a bigger and better room, but it's even smaller than the last one!" "Well, this serves me right," I added, "letting my mom do almost all the work in arranging my room." He then left me to arrange my new "bigger" room. This was the first official day for me in seminary formation; the purging of the old man in me had surely begun this time. Welcome to the seminary!

Teaching

In each person, there is an insatiable need for something greater than and for himself; it is a sort of limitless vacuum in our souls that seeks fulfillment. This immense yearning has been placed there by God himself. Many, because they do not realize what can truly fill this vacuum, search their whole lives in the wrong places and may come to have all that they can desire materially and physically yet will still have that deep thirst which can become as strong as ever, if not stronger.

This is why persons can be the most beautiful, talented, financially secure, the top in one's field or career, may have the world's admiration and adulation, and may even experience a constant feeling of satisfaction of the fulfillment of their worldly desires yet have no real joy, peace, and fulfillment in their souls. When they suddenly experience a moment of quiet and aloneness, away from the hustle and bustle of the

crowd and the rat race, a moment wherein they question and reflect on the direction of their lives (like in the mid-life crisis), deep down they feel that there is something vital missing. Some who experience this meaninglessness try to drown this void by seeking immediately some form of worldly stimulation and distraction; and if this void is covered up and not addressed the right way, it becomes more and more constant in a person's life as the person grows older, there can begin a search for greater and greater fulfillment on sensual stimulations and even deadly addictions to drown it out.

We therefore notice all around us that some people can never seem to have enough of what the world can offer; unsatisfied they seek more and greed for more and yet deep down the hunger of their soul grows in proportion; their eyes betray the lack of true joy and peace. Solitude and silence are threatening to them because these will allow this deep void to come to the forefront of their consciousness.

One can drown and hide the emptiness temporarily and superficially with constant activity, recreation, and work yet when forced by unavoidable and unforeseen circumstances to stop and quiet down, we discover and feel again the power drawing us to something beyond and more than what the world can offer; it is a call towards transcendence.

Now, this insatiable need of the soul, as we have said, has been placed there by God because we have been created for something infinitely greater than ourselves, other people, and the world; we have been created for God himself. It is only our infinite God who can quench and fulfill that infinite thirst and hunger felt in the depths of our souls. Our goal in life as Christians which we learn even as children, is to know, love, and serve God.

God desires that we love him not because he needs our love, since he is infinitely fulfilled in himself, but so that we may be absolutely fulfilled by him; he knows that only his love will completely saturate our souls much more than we can ever desire and imagine, and nothing else will do, be it the goods and pleasures of this entire world or even all the love and admiration of every person past and present including all the angels in heaven. We are created for God and only God suffices!

Woe therefore to those who search to fill this void in the wrong places; they will never be satisfied, only to be continually addicted and frustrated while they are alive, and if they do not stop and heed the voice of this void properly and in the right way, they will end up infinitely much worse after death.

CHAPTER II

Origins

When I was growing up, I had all that I needed materially. My four brothers and I had a normal and happy childhood; of course, this included the typical quarrels found in a family of all boys. But we were very close as brothers, closer than any fraternity. I finished my elementary days with many beautiful memories at Letran College. The ’70s for me was a time of fresh air, beautiful and clean surroundings, sunny skies, laughter and games, swimming and water gun fights, carefree exploring, field trips and stay-ins, boy scouts and outdoor sports and, of course, Voltes V.

I still remember my dad always reminding us to go to Mass whenever he would drop us off to school in our Ford Escort. Even at that time, some of my teachers already knew that I wanted to become a priest when I grew up. They were truly incredulously excited for me. Summers were entirely spent playing all kinds of games with my brothers: plastic sword fights, toy pistol fights, rubber band fights, building model soldiers and ships, wrestling competitions in the pool, hide-and-seek around our large house, and even when night time arrived, we played scaring each other to death. We almost scared our old driver to death. Once our neighbor called my Mom to ask if everything was okay with the family because she saw soldiers in uniform surrounding our house—that was us, of course. We were then never allowed to climb the roof again.

Entering high school at UST was a very new and quite difficult experience for me. First, it was a co-educational institution. I had almost no idea how to relate with girls and hence I was quite shy when they were around. But even so, at the first day of school, I developed a sudden “crush” for a petite first year school girl. Whenever I see her now in batch reunions, I remember with nostalgia that early experience of “puppy love.”

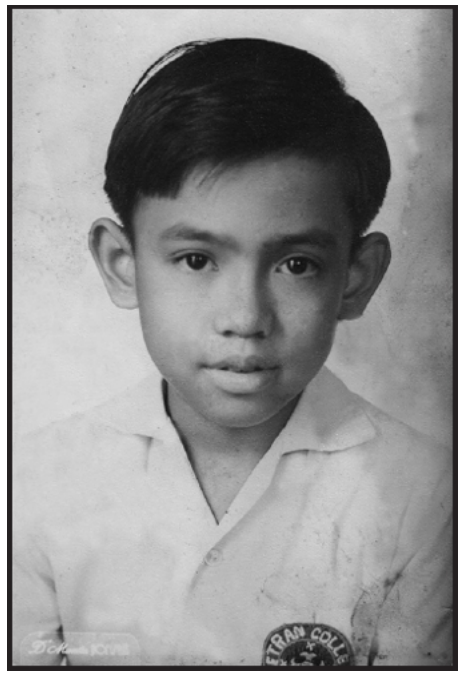
Anyway, because of my shyness, I ended my first year in school

without even speaking to more than half of my female classmates. If ever I spoke to any of them, the most I would say would only amount to just one sentence. I wanted to get to know them more but just didn't know how. Anyway, it helped a lot that I was later elected consistently as a class officer after my first year since I had no choice but to approach and interact with them. "OK, time to pay your class dues!" I would say with a straight and serious face. "Now!"

God was not really the center of my life then during those days in high school, having so many new experiences to process as a normal growing teenager in the early '80s. Although I was a member of the Legion of Mary and president of the Columbian Squires in high school, they seemed to me more of social clubs than spiritual organizations.

God, for me, was of course present in my life but he was more of an abstract concept than a Someone intimately involved with me. His reality in my life was, in a sense, general and vague with no real connection to my day-to-day activities.

My faith was a faith that I had not yet wrestled with and made my own; it was more of a family tradition that I was obliged to keep. In my elementary days, the inspiration and the desire to become a priest was given to me but my intention was focused more on becoming like my childhood idol, my uncle, Fr. Carlos, who was a well-loved, handsome, and very charismatic priest.



Graduating from Letran College

Anyway, high school was a time that I did not really enjoy; there were the fraternity rumbles, the bullies, the strut dancers with their white gloves who always stole the show, the hazing when I joined to become a CAT officer (I hated especially hiding around the entire campus of UST from those bully officers who find intense pleasure in terrorizing and punching their subordinates), the terror teachers, the many rules and regulations that I tried to escape from, the sense of being left out because I was so short during those years and the other boys were taller than I was, not to mention the girls who grew up much earlier than the boys, the hiding from the girls who "fell" for me and were too aggressive for my taste and comfort as well as the uniform we boys had to wear; a white polo over very thick and itchy brown slacks. Of course, there were, I'm sure, also many beautiful memories of that time; they just tend to elude my consciousness at the moment. But today, when I meet my old classmates (we had just celebrated our 25th year anniversary), I enjoy their company so much so that the "traumas" of high school life have been more or less erased from my consciousness.

I entered college again at UST (Faculty of Arts and Letters), and I became president of my first year class and this was the beginning of my immersion in social activism. This was the early '80s when President Marcos was still in power. As a student leader, I became focused on the excitement brought about by the mass actions and rallies in the streets of Manila. I was somewhat a rebellious teenager; I rebelled against the government, against the administration of UST, and sadly, even against my parents. I was the one who never obeyed the house rule to call if we can't go home as scheduled. My Mom once unleashed our dog at night so she'll know when I would climb the locked gate to enter the house. How volatile are the emotions of the young when they have not yet formed their identities. I joined all the rallies at Liwasang Bonifacio and Mendiola and experienced the excitement of being chased by the police as well as being tear-gassed. Also at school, I would run away from some members of the faculty after putting up illegal posters on the walls of our building. When there would be a tuition fee increase, you could be sure I would be one of the first to cut classes and join the rally.

With the idealism of youth, I felt that I had found causes worth fighting for. By that time, I was also a member of the LFS or League of Filipino Students, an organization that I found to my dismay was truly communist in ideology. I left soon afterwards when I learned that they were calling another mass action, but this time against the newly installed Cory administration. Then and there, I knew that all they wanted was to destabilize society, for no government would be good enough for them and that they would only be satisfied after a bloody communist takeover. Even now, when I see red flags raised during

rallies (sometimes even religious rallies), I feel my blood boiling. After the EDSA revolution, although I still served in both the college student council and the philosophy student council, during my last years in college, I was then a more quiet type of person, preferring being alone or being with my *barkada* only.

My *barkada*, a close-knit group of five, was where I found the answer for my need for adolescent peer acceptance and affirmation; we were truly a sort of "brotherhood" and we shared a lot of good and exciting times together. Even during those years, drugs were already rampant; they were in abundant supply tempting even my *barkada*.

But the Lord without my knowing and noticing it, was always very much present in my life, guiding and protecting me. During those turbulent teenage years I felt not only a dislike for any kind of illegal drug, I did not even have a curiosity for it. No amount of peer pressure could dissuade me from my resolve to keep away from drugs. As for smoking, that was a big no-no for me since I had asthma.

Of course, drinking beer and rhum was another matter; let us just say that I drank more than I should and almost every other week in the house of one of my *barkada* friends.

With regard to my spiritual life at that time of my life, I was a Sunday Catholic. And although I went to Mass every Sunday with my family, I rarely received Holy Communion. During communion time my father would turn his gaze on me, if I did not stand up to receive our Lord. My mother had to force me just to go to Confession!

During my years in college, I found out that I had an aptitude for politics in my studies and this enthusiasm was bolstered by the political turmoil of the '80s. As I mentioned earlier, I rarely missed the rallies and mass actions whenever there was a call for one by the activist leaders in the university.

I had decided to enter law school after college because at that time, I saw its close connection with politics. Another reason was that Jofe, our eldest brother (I was next in line to him), was taking Physical Therapy (he was the first in the history of that faculty to graduate with summa cum laude honors) and already headed for medicine and I didn't want being compared with him or compete with him in any way which painstakingly occurred frequently during our elementary and high school days; I always came out in the losing end. That was why we brothers always called him "the Brain."

But I chose philosophy as my major in college and not political science because our dean in the faculty of Arts and Letters convinced us that philosophy would be of greater help than political science in becoming a good lawyer since it would form our thinking processes better (logical thinking especially). She also mentioned that what we

would learn in political science (which was mostly memorization) would only be repeated once we entered law school. By the way, our dean then had a doctorate in philosophy, so there.

But another reason I decided to take philosophy instead of my original plan of taking political science was the inkling deep down inside of me that maybe, just maybe, I might still decide to pursue the priesthood.

Going back a bit, during my junior year in college, the EDSA revolution occurred and there were so many changes in our society; I also faced my own personal changes. After months, the euphoria in the university died down; the excitement of fighting and even risking one's life for a cause was replaced by a more placid atmosphere. Activist students returned to the daily grind of school assignments and examinations. My own life was then winding down, or starting then to be more focused.

Brothers (from left to right): Joel, Jofe, Martin, myself, and Tommy

After I graduated from college, my desire for both law and the priesthood waned. With all my idealisms in college, I didn't know what to do next with my life; the stark reality of joining the workforce and entering into the rat race came crashing in. Real life had begun!

How fleeting are the idealisms of youth if they do not transcend the merely material, momentary, superficial, and the worldly.

During that summer vacation after graduation, a friend and I met a group of girls in Baguio (the summer capital of the Philippines and a romantic haven because of its cool weather) who knew me from my days in the student council. The closeness that I had with my *barkada* was gone since we were then journeying our own separate ways in the real world of work. With the absence of peer intimacy, this time was the moment in my life that I was most open to having a steady relationship with a girlfriend. A few months later, one of the girls I met during that

summer vacation became my girlfriend. What a new and exciting experience it was for me! My close friend who was with me when we met the girls in Baguio was infuriated with me when he learned of our relationship; he blamed me for destroying our new *barkada* of two boys and three girls.

But actually, the real reason for his anger was that he had plans before to court my new girlfriend this time and it did not help that when we told him that we were already going steady, he noticed that we were holding hands under the table!

Anyway, I later started to work in our family business full-time and the only real excitement in my life came during weekends when I was free from work and able to spend my hard-earned money on myself and sometimes with my girlfriend. Even at this time of my life, I had it easy since I was still living in our house. But I had a lot of friction with my parents during this time because whenever I would come home late after a date I would get scolded; sadly this happened almost every weekend. I had become the "black sheep" in the family. Much later, I asked my Mom why she was so strict with me. She said "Maybe unconsciously, I was preserving you for God, alone. Besides you were hard headed."

Outwardly, I seemed the normal energetic and enthusiastic young professional going to work with my slacks, tie, and briefcase, attending a lot of self-development seminars to improve my professional skills; yet deep down inside something vital was missing, a sort of vacuum and the meaninglessness to it all.

I asked myself: "Is this all there is to life?" "Am I waiting for the next weekend just to find some excitement before starting another week of the usual grind?" "When I was still studying, I had many exciting expectations from life, where are they now?" "Is there more meaning to life than this never-ending cycle of work, spend, enjoy, work, spend, enjoy?" It was at this time that I started to delve into the occult since this seemed to me a mysterious and exciting world that filled up my then routinary and somehow meaningless life.

I was a voracious reader just like my father and I spent a lot of time reading novels and fascinating human interest books. So how did I end up entering into the occult?

I had started with an interest in psychology which easily led to the new emerging field of parapsychology; and since there is a very thin line between the paranormal and the esoteric/occult, I ended up with the New Age Movement and its esoteric/occult base. I focused and was fascinated by ghosts, poltergeists, and demons. I obtained a practical guide that would allow me to learn and interact with this world of the paranormal.

I tried to develop my potentials using the pseudo-scientific/pseudo-mystical teachings of the New Age Movement which, of course, included Eastern mysticism practices.

Teaching

The great danger of the New Age Movement is the teaching that we can become gods without God. Developing one's psychic powers and connecting with preternatural power sources through trance states and magical rituals make one believe that he (man) is powerful in this world and can become even more powerful if he but develops more his abilities and connects with even more potent power sources.

The devil knows the inherent psychic abilities and capacities of man and lures him into discovering and making use of them so that man may feel that he can become like gods, having power over things, circumstances, and those around him. The devil further lures man into his clutches by granting him additional preternatural powers if he but connects and makes pacts with the spirit world such as in shamanism, witchcraft, and Satanism.

Here, as one obtains more and more power, his desire for it grows even more and it reaches a point when he is even ready to offer any sacrifice or whatever it takes to obtain even more potent power. Hence we may see among occult/esoteric practitioners that there is a power struggle to become the most powerful magician, witch, wizard, faith healer or sorcerer. Here, of course, the pact with the evil spirit is sealed and their souls are forfeited to these spirits. Hence in possession cases, when the occult practitioner desires to break the pact, we see that the devil will not easily let go; he never gives his services for free, especially if he has given much to the practitioner.

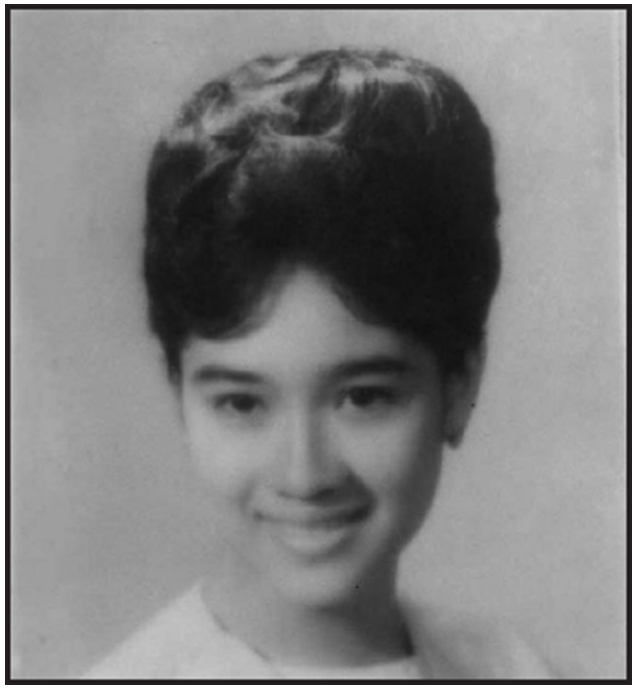
In our office (AMOE), we have encountered cases of even human sacrifices to the evil spirits and cannibalism. Yes, the occult is real and there is power there, but the power is gained at the loss of one's very soul.

We have to remember that occult/esoteric practices would never have survived the many centuries of human history if there was no power involved in them which an initiate can tap into.

The devil truly desires that we believe we can have total control over our destinies and that we have no need of God. That we can become happy without God, this is the ultimate lie. Imagine the devil, the ultimate prisoner and unhappy one passing himself off as the great dispenser of happiness and freedom. Our psychic abilities and all the powers of the devil (which is merely preternatural) can never compare with the supernatural power of God who governs with love and

providence the entire universe.

My Dad, Atty. Enrique P. Syquia



My Mom, Mrs. Leticia C. Syquia

CHAPTER III

Turning Point

The Lord, in his infinite mercy, immediately awakened me to the evil reality of these practices because he allowed me to become a victim of demonic attacks. A warning is in order here; a lesson I learned in the ministry is that usually, when one enters deeply into the occult, the demons will not usually "rock the boat"; they would allow the practitioner some form of peace and even "good luck" in their pursuit of worldly ambitions; it is only later when there is very little chance for the hardened person to reform, or when the occult practitioner is now old and "useless," that is when the demons manifest their true identity to the horrified practitioner. Sometimes, the practitioner himself begins to realize the evil that he is involved in but would be so afraid to return to the Lord, because he himself has experienced the so-called powers and grip of the devil and in addition, he is blinded and has never learned to have faith and trust in the infinite mercy of God. (Of course, the devil will always try to blind us to the reality of the Divine Mercy of God).

Terror, not mere fear, started to fill first and foremost my sleeping hours; I would be demonically harassed through my dreams but unlike ordinary nightmares where there is only fear, my heart and my entire being, were filled with dread and horror. I knew in my heart that I had opened up myself to the devil.

I am one who is not really afraid of ghosts and ghostly apparitions but during those nights of extraordinary attack, I learned stark terror of the dark and the paranormal like nothing I had ever experienced before. Demons would manifest themselves in my dreams to torture and suffocate me; only heartfelt prayers delivered me from these attacks. It soon reached a point that I was already afraid to close my eyes to sleep. Even my waking hours were very much affected; there was a constant chill in my body that penetrated to my bones and my heart seemed to be always palpitating and filled with dread; I was a walking wreck; I was living a nightmare! It was only with great difficulty that I went to work

and acted as normally as I could. No one knew the inner demons I was struggling with!

Looking back to this time, I saw that the demonic entered my life through three openings; first, I had opened my psychic abilities. This was done by practicing activities that I learned in books especially books on yoga meditation. The exercises opened up my psyche (third eye in occult terms) that they became open doorways to the world of the spirit; or more particularly to demonic psychic attacks. Second, by immersing myself with books on ghosts and demons, fear entered my heart which tore open a bigger hole in my psyche (fear tends to heighten psychic sensitivities and therefore one becomes more aware of spirit world entities around). This focusing on fearful topics also allowed spirits of fear to be attached to me and aggravate my fears. Lastly, since I was not in the state of grace, I had no protection whatsoever from the devil's oppressions.

A point to emphasize is that I was not the only victim of demonic harassments; even those around me experienced them. My cousin, Owen, whose bed was beside mine, and who later also entered the seminary with me, experienced the same psychic attacks when asleep; my brother, Martin, whose bed was across mine at the far end of our room, experienced paranormal activity in his side of the room that he accused me as being the cause of these disturbances; and, of course, I was!

But with the grace of God, due to my solid religious foundation, thanks to my parents, I knew where to turn to for help—the Church!

I began a serious return to my faith, but with a sincerity and earnestness that were the results of my shocking realization that there truly existed an unseen realm populated by evil beings and that they were out to get me. My survival instinct was in full red alert mode.

I started to seek deliverance from God through intense prayer, the sacraments, and sacramentals (I don't know even today why I never confided and sought help from a priest). The beautiful thing was that God was not only waiting to deliver me from the clutches of the devil to show me how real and concerned he was about me personally, but he also used that opportunity to begin a real intimate relationship with me. All that he needed was just a small opening on my part for him to enter; that opening was my cry for help.

I later discovered that God had many beautiful plans for me and that the deliverance from the demonic attacks was just the beginning of this journey of discovery. God used the devil's attacks as a doorway to get to me; no wonder he permitted all this to happen although, of course, it was all my doing. God truly can bring good out of evil!

Teaching

How sad it really is when people enter the New Age to search for meaning in life when the most beautiful plans and blessings that go far beyond what anyone could ever imagine, have already been prepared for us by God. All he needs is that we invite him into our lives because he will never force himself on us; he has given us freedom and will always respect it.

His plans for us not only pertain to our soul but to the entire person. This includes all our human needs: emotional, psychological, and even physical, but over and above all these, his concern for us is in the world to come, where true life begins!

It took months before the preternatural attacks stopped but by that time my spiritual life was again alive and healthier than it ever was. Daily Mass, frequent confession, regular meditation and spiritual reading, personal heartfelt vocal prayer, visiting Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and a liberal use of the sacramentals resulted in the dawning again of my vocation.

A saint I am most grateful for in the rebirth of my vocation is St. Thérèse of Lisieux. I used to read her autobiography, *Story of a Soul* in an isolated room in our office building. This I did during my lunch breaks at work. My reading titles had dramatically changed from the occult and demonic to the saintly and the divine. As I read her autobiography, I was astounded at the great personal love and intimate care that the Lord showered on her. “This is too good to be true,” I told myself.

I, of course, knew in my mind about the love of God for us, but during that time, I believed in my heart that he was more of a distant disciplinarian father waiting to catch us in the act of doing something not good. I never knew that he could be so tender and involved with each one of us personally; that we literally could experience this fatherly intimacy and personal care not only through our minds but also in the depths of our hearts; that his relating with us can be as real and tangible as any normal human interaction engaging the whole of the person: mind, spirit, and the deepest of emotions. It was overwhelming to realize that his love and way of relating with us can be as concrete and intimate as any deep human loving relationship and could go even much, much deeper than that if we but remove the blocks (sin) to his love.

As I read and reflected on the experiences of the saint, the Lord would inspire my mind and intimately and gently, touch my heart at certain intervals, that I would start shedding tears and literally cry. Of course, I tried as much as possible to be discreet since the person in the next

room might wonder what was happening to me. I also made sure to wash my face thoroughly and to check my eyes (that they were not puffed up and red) before returning to work to forestall any kind of gossip. “Poor boy! Busted by his girlfriend!”

And at one point, with the grace of God, as I continued to pore over and savor the autobiography, I became aware of what my heart was telling me: “I wanted, really desired, to discover and experience who God truly is, the God of this beautiful and childlike saint.” But I did not stop there; I added: “And not only will I make my life’s mission to discover who he really is but I desire to give myself entirely to him, to serve him until the end of my life.”

My uncle, Fr. Carlos

I knew then what I wanted to do: return to school to learn more about God and share who he is to others. That then became my mission in life! At this point, although I wanted to serve God, I still had not made any conscious decision to serve him through the priesthood. I thought more about serving him by teaching religion at a Catholic university or school. My mother herself used to teach religion and English while completing her Masters of Education at UST. By the way, that was where she met my dad who was her professor and who fell head over heels for my mom.

Also, at this point, it would be good to remember that I still had my girlfriend and that we had agreed on a three-year plan before getting married.

So as soon as time permitted, I went to Loyola School of Studies, at the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Manila University, to inquire regarding their graduate courses on theology.

But as would have it, Divine Providence stepped in, in the person of my uncle priest Fr. Carlos. He was the oldest of the boys on my mother’s side. My other uncles were all named seemingly after great figures of mythology: Cesar, Hector, and Marius. I was in the office where I

worked when my uncle Carlos visited and I mentioned to him my plans of taking up graduate studies in theology and teaching about God to others. He told me in a matter-of-fact manner: “Why not just enter the seminary and try it for a year and if you decide that it’s not for you, then leave?” All that I could say was, “Huh?!” Entering the seminary was the farthest thing from my mind then; I wanted to get married!

But his words struck a deep chord in my heart; I had never for many years at that time ever seriously considered the vocation to the priesthood; it was always at the back of my mind, never coming to the forefront of my consciousness; until the time when my uncle proposed the idea.

Much later, after that encounter, with the idea of the priesthood then out in the open, I started to imagine myself a priest. To be honest, at that time, I could not, in my wildest imaginings, see myself as a priest. As I tried to imagine myself wearing the clerical polo shirt of a priest, I could easily situate my face wearing the uniform but my heart seemed to be not part of the picture.

At night, I tossed and turned on my bed, wrestling with questions like, “Do I really want to become a priest?” “Could I really become a priest?” “Can I really leave all behind? “What about my desire to get married?” “Can I survive in this vocation?” “Is God calling me? Me?!”

But little by little the certainty that the call to the priesthood was a call for me took roots deeper and deeper until it reached the decisive moment when I remarked, “OK, I’ll do it; I’ll apply for the seminary!” This decision was not anymore the boyhood dream of becoming like my uncle, the tall and handsome charismatic priest, which then seemed so far away and long ago; it was at this time a present life-altering decision that would radically impact the reality of my present and future life. Of course, when I was deciding all this, at the back of my mind was my girlfriend who had no inkling of what I was going through. This was a dilemma that had to be confronted sooner than later.

CHAPTER IV

Letting Go

Having more or less decided to enter the seminary of San Carlos (Makati City), the Archdiocesan Seminary of Manila, the relationship with my girlfriend suddenly loomed as the stark reality that it was; there was no possibility that she would approve of my plan. Knowing her, I knew that there was not even a chance in a million that she would agree to any change in our future plans. And besides, I knew that I did not have the heart to tell her about my budding vocation since this would be (knowing her) a traumatic experience for her. With this in mind, I told the Lord in prayer, "Lord, if it is truly your will that I enter the seminary, please grant me a sign by smoothing out this dilemma since on my own, I would never be able to open the subject matter of a vocation to her." After that prayer, I had not long to wait for God to act!

The romantic relationship that my girlfriend and I had was then going on for a year and a half (unbeknownst to my mother) when I made this prayer. There was, during this time of discovering a more intimate face of God, a major change with how my girlfriend and I spent our time together: from the usual eating out, watching movies, and strolling along the malls, this time we were visiting convents and churches, going to confession, and even praying together. I never really thought of how my girlfriend saw all our new "outings"; but maybe if I gave time to try and guess what she thought, it might more or less be something like, "What's happening with Jocis? Is he undergoing some sort of mid-life crisis?" Of course, I was just 21, hence that was an impossibility.

But as patient and kindhearted that she was, she kept all her thoughts about our "spiritual outings" to herself.

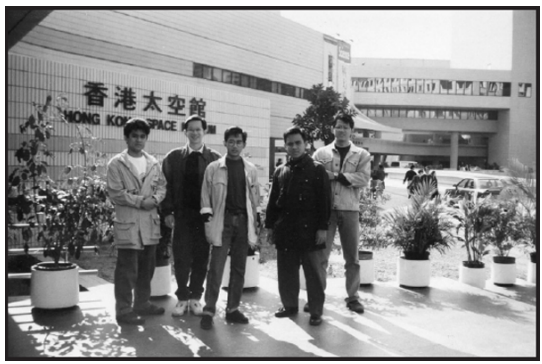
Then, a few days after I made my prayer asking God for a sign, an event occurred that was truly unexpected since I did not expect God to answer my prayer very swiftly; I thought I would still be given the chance to psychologically adjust to the idea of living again a "single lifestyle" the idea of me, watching a movie alone; me, browsing the

bookstores alone; me, touring the malls alone, and so on and so forth.

Anyway, I remember that day as though it were yesterday; it was February 14 and we had met to celebrate this day of hearts in the old Makati Commercial Center; this was 1989.

She had brought along a wrapped Valentine's gift for me; as usual, I was thoughtless not to bring anything to give her. As we sat down to eat in one of the many restaurants (Japanese, I think) within the commercial complex, I opened the gift and it was a mug with a picture of a teddy bear and the words, "I love you beary much." I thanked her, of course, and we started some small talk which I don't remember anymore; but what I do remember is that she suddenly asked me from out of the blue, "Jocis, are you thinking of becoming a priest?" I was caught flabbergasted and was so unprepared that without really thinking, I started blurting out in a confused and tongue-twisted hurried manner, what had been going on in my mind for the past weeks.

The whole story of the birth of my vocation poured forth from my lips non-stop, within a span of just a few minutes. I don't really know how much of the details she grasped but I was just so glad when it was over. And that was that! We looked at one another in a tension-filled silence that seemed to last for hours although in reality it was just mere seconds. In that tension-filled atmosphere the uncomfortable silence was broken when she said, "So, when do you plan to enter the seminary?" I quickly and sheepishly answered, "This June." Another round of tension-filled silence.



Touring together (from left to right): Martin, Jofe, Joel, myself, and Tommy

With Martin and his family (also five children) in the US

"Okay," she then answered in a sort of hurt and defeated way as she looked me straight in the eyes, "Then that's that! There's nothing more that I can do but agree to your plan. If only you were leaving me for another girl, I would fight to the end for you. But with God, that's quite another matter."

She then sadly said the words that almost broke my heart, "Let's pay the bill because I want to go home now."

Not knowing what else to say, I agreed. As we walked through the complex, I stopped her in an isolated spot between two cars and told her that I wanted to talk more about what was happening; it seemed to me that what was happening was happening too fast for my comfort. It was then that she started to shed some tears in front of me and this really almost broke my heart. I tried explaining to her in a more empathetic way, narrating once again what was going on inside of me that led to my decision to enter the seminary. Although she seemed better disposed, she said, "Please, I would rather that we part ways here, you don't have to accompany me anymore." And so she left me standing there with a lump in my throat, holding the mug that she had given me for Valentine's Day.

When I reached home, I lay on my bed and got hold of the mug. As I started staring at it, the events of that day started floating through my mind. It was then that tears started coming out; I started crying because of the pain of hurting someone close to my heart as well as knowing with finality that I had already forever lost her. The full brunt of the detachment necessary for my vocation hit me with such intensity during those moments that I truly felt emotionally miserable. "Why, dear God, did it have to be so painful?" "Why?" After lying on my bed for some time trying to endure the crushing pain in my heart, my heart felt that it was literally being torn in two. When I felt that I could take no more (I even had a hard time breathing), I decided to go downstairs and look for

anyone in our house (hopefully one of my brothers) to be with and do something, anything! Unfortunately, my brothers (also unbeknownst to my mother) were out on dates! The one who saved me was my father; he was eating dinner alone and I eagerly joined him. Afterwards, we went to his room and watched a show I do not anymore remember; it could have been one of those black-and-white movies my father so loved to watch but sometimes bored my brothers and I to death; but what was important for me was that as long as it would take my mind off what I was experiencing, any show was good enough for me!

It was only much later, looking back at all that had transpired, that I knew that the Lord indeed was giving me the sign that I had asked for. He had indeed paved the way for my vocation; the mere fact that my girlfriend was the one who brought up the topic since I did not have the courage to do so and her unchallenged acceptance of my decision which was so uncharacteristic of her point to God's answer to my prayer. And all this happened with a very quick, although very painful, finality.

So then here I was in the seminary. My first days were truly an experience of novelty, excitement, and anticipation. My emotions were centered on the exhilaration that I was having and I thought that this time, all would be happy and fine. I saw the future as bright and that it would only get better each day. There was, of course, a bit of loneliness for my family; I was missing them, for I would not be seeing them that frequently. Of course, I never mentioned that especially to my brothers otherwise they would respond in chorus with, "Yuck!" "Gross!" "How corny!" We have a funny way of showing our affection for each other.

But then with my new companions in the seminary who would be my new "brothers," I hoped that I could get at least a bit of the closeness that I had with my four brothers. My four brothers and I grew up close together since there was only, more or less, one year between each one of us. We played the same games of Voltes 5, Lego, and Atari during our childhood years, went out like a *barkada* and sometimes drank beer together (except Jofe, the "Brain") when we were teenagers, and when we reached late adolescence we even went out together discoing with girls on dates. Of course, Tommy and Martin got the best-looking girls; Jofe got the nerds while I got the problematic ones who needed someone to listen to their woes (here, I was already starting to discover my talent in counseling); Joel, because he was still too young for hard drinks or girls, sat beside Jofe drinking coke which Jofe also usually drank.

I really missed those intimate moments, secure and proud to be with my brothers.

Of course, as we were growing up, there were the normal verbal and physical fights among us boys especially between Martin and I, the next

sibling after me. (By the way, he always lost when it came to a physical match.) But usually, no sooner had we started punching and kicking, there would be Jofe, the eldest and tallest, always the responsible one, breaking us apart amidst the punches and kicks that sometimes connected with his own body. When Martin and I were friends again, we would sometimes join forces and bully Joel the youngest, since we thought that our mom was spoiling him. He was never spanked unlike the rest of us, Jofe included! Of course, Martin and I when we now reminisce those times, we would regret how we treated him. Martin and I, now that we are older, have become the best of friends. People are sometimes surprised when we tell them that we are not twins; it is because we have the same voice, mannerisms, eccentricities, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and answers to the ultimate questions of life. The only real conspicuous difference between us is that he is better-looking than I am, although I look younger. I will always be grateful to God for giving me the brothers that I have now. My only regret is that I don't have a sister.

This time in the seminary, I had no difficulty relating with my co-seminarians, my new "brothers." I think this was due to my maturity in age (I was going 22 at that time) as well as I was used to dealing with boys, growing up with all brothers. I was in what was called the "Formation Year Department"; it is a one-year intensive introductory program to seminary living.

This department was created for those who did not graduate from a high school seminary (minor seminary) as well as those who had already graduated from college (like me) or were college undergraduates. There were 24 of us, excited and ready-to-go new seminarians. We were from very diverse backgrounds and ages; I was one of the oldest since I had already graduated from college and had even worked. There were four of us who had finished college, one had a degree in engineering, one in commerce, and the last in sociology. We, including an undergraduate who was already quite old, were informally called the "council of elders" and we had our own private cubicles unlike the others who were assigned to dormitories in the floor below us; they were younger than us and most had only graduated from high school. My cousin Owen, who surprised me by deciding to apply, at the last minute, to enter the seminary, was assigned to one of the dormitories below us. He had completed one year of college at the Far Eastern University.

The first month was difficult; we had to adjust to having no radios, walkmans, TVs, and even electric fans. We used mosquito nets to keep those pesky insects at bay. We had no newspapers and could go home for an overnight stay only once every two months, hence we were

practically cut off from the world. This was the arrangement, of course, so that we could learn the virtues needed to become future shepherds of the Church without any distractions and to discover the grace of solitude, that is, being comfortably and joyfully alone with God.

Food was meager, therefore we had to make sure how much food we placed on our plates lest a brother be left with less than what he needed to maintain his health. Conflicts tended to erupt when it came to food because someone would sometimes end up with only the rice left. Now that I am in charge of the department, more than 20 years later, the same situation exists: same department, new faces, same stomachs that cannot seem to have enough so much so that someone ends up with only rice to eat. But fortunately, whenever this occurs, each one gives a portion of their viand from their plates to the "rice guy."

During my first year, I decided to practice some form of mortification: I made sure that I would always be the last to get from the viands set before us; whatever piece left was what I would take. This aided me a lot in developing simplicity of tastes and self-discipline.

I also tried my best to continually purify my motives with regard to my assignments; before doing some assignment, I would offer all that I would do to God as a thanksgiving for the many blessings he had given me and continuously gives to me. I also made sure that all conversations I had with my co-seminarians centered on God or spiritual matters, and they knew this; if anyone would make a green joke in my presence, even though it was really funny, my straight serious face would right away remind them not to say such things again when I was around. Of course, they saw me as a killjoy!

Aside from the simple lifestyle in the seminary that we had to struggle to adjust to, we also had to embrace, with humility and trust, the discipline that was asked of us by our strict priest director. Once, when he caught some of my classmates not playing sports during sports time; he totally canceled all sports until the end of the year. We therefore used the time supposedly for sports in building a few walls that until now surround the seminary complex.

I believe that my greatest difficulty among the assignments given me was cleaning the dozens of shower and toilet cubicles. Many times I was close to vomiting as I had to gather with my bare hands the remnants in the drainage of the shower cubicles.

But I was truly happy to be where I was. And besides, this was how I really envisioned seminary discipline and training would be. Seminary formation had to be tough because it was forming the future saints and shepherds of the Church of God. It was forming another Christ, an *Alter Christus*; it was forming spiritual leaders according to the mind of God! These are God's frontline soldiers whom he could send to the far-flung

areas of the globe to do battle with the forces of evil and claim souls for him! Yes, training must be hard and tough to produce the best of the best!

The academics were also one thing I enjoyed as much as visiting Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament in our oratory. Some of my companions seemed to love especially sports time and also recreation time in the evening where sharing of one's life story was done amidst indoor games and activities. The beginning months for me were one great adventure to become a saint and a future shepherd of God.

Teaching

For the world, success is at the end of one's life, when one has gained and attained a lot for oneself be it money, positions, power, or possessions. But in God's eyes, success is something very different: success is at the end of one's life when one discovers how much one has lost—lost for God and for others. Therefore, that which is greatest in a person is usually that which is not seen, that which one has given up and sacrificed, that which one has willingly lost.

A well-known spiritual author once stated something startling when read at first: "that the greatness of Jesus is seen more in what he did not become and do, than what he did become."

Jesus, God of infinite power, lost all when he came to save us: kingly power, status, and position, divine beauty and riches, self-will, and even at the end of his life he lost his friends, clothes, and every bit of his dignity. He lost all for the Father and for us. This is where we find the greatness of Jesus as Savior. Let us ask ourselves, "At this moment in my life, how great a loser am I for God?" In addition to this, let us ask ourselves daily, "How can I still lose and give up more each day for him and for others?" This is the life worthy of heaven: when we lose all for God, God then becomes our all, and when God becomes our all, then and only then do we have everything.

With co-seminarians

CHAPTER V

A New Challenge

After some time in seminary formation, I had adjusted to the daily routine of seminary training. I was happy and contented. But there was a brewing trial within the edge of my consciousness that when it struck, I was caught unawares. The “old man” in me was again trying to reassert itself against the “new man” that was still being created. What was surprising was that it centered on an issue I thought I had already resolved—my former girlfriend.

It went this way. Little by little, as time went by, my emotions started to cause me dismay. I felt a deep sense of loss and it seemed that the full brunt of my breaking off with my former girlfriend was just starting to take effect! Looking at the situation through the lens of psychology, this was understandable since in the beginning of seminary formation when one is being trained in detachment from the “world” and one is isolated (to reduce distractions so that one may more easily encounter God) from society to learn solitude, it is normal that a vacuum for former worldly stimulation including female contact should not only be created but also exaggerated.

The senses were not getting the stimulation and distractions which it had become used to; the spirit, on the other hand, was still in the process of developing its sensitivities to God, sensitivities that would later give it its deep joy, peace, and fulfillment. I still had not yet developed in my heart real solitude (a loving aloneness with God).

Comparing the experience that I was undergoing and the experience of the people of Israel as they were traversing the desert towards the land promised to them by Yahweh, there are a few similarities that I could make to better explain my situation. When Israel left Egypt for the promised land, and was wandering for many years in the desert, the people usually complained to Moses and even decided to return to Egypt and slavery because of the difficulties involved. This was because they lacked the faith in Moses that the promised land was a land that was

truly filled with milk and honey. The Israelites were in the in-between place of the desert where faith in Yahweh was of utmost necessity if they were to reach their destination. There was a strong temptation to return to Egypt because they knew and experienced its reality while the promised land had not yet been experienced by any of the Israelites journeying in the desert. The only way that they would be able to reach the promised land would be to trust Yahweh of the reality of the place and that it was as good and true as Yahweh had promised to them.

Yes, I had a real and deep experience of God before I entered the seminary, but it was still more of the emotional kind, not the spiritual one, since I still had to not only overcome the "old man" in me that was blocking God's graces and blessings, but also develop more the "new man" in me which is more sensitive to the touches of God, touches that bring about the real and true joys of Christian life.

Another reason, I believe, for my growing crisis was that God seemed to be purifying my intentions and motives for entering the seminary; he was, in a sense, testing me whether I had entered the seminary to merely experience the consolations of God or I entered in order to truly encounter the God of consolations.

Just like the Israelites of old, I had to have faith in what the Lord allowed me to experience when I felt the call outside: that he was a real Father to me and not a mere abstraction; that he loved me in a very unique and personal way and that he desired a much deeper relationship with me, a relationship that would blossom within the walls of the seminary. I had to follow through with my commitment! The challenge for me then was to persevere in faith regarding my commitment to give myself to God in formation, to remain focused on developing my relationship with God.

Teaching

Being true to our commitment to God is therefore of utmost importance if we are to truly glorify God and reach the destination his plans have prepared for us.

Many today are afraid of commitment; they are afraid to risk, they believe that it would hinder their freedom; they believe that other better options may come along later.

They are therefore reactive towards life and not proactive, they are passive onlookers. These people only live in the present, hence they journey any road that may be alluring to their senses at the moment, and therefore their lives go around in circles, they do not reach very far in their spiritual life or they even end up in dangerous situations. Their energies are scattered and wasted. This is sad.

Commitment is like a map at the beginning of any journey; in the beginning we think we don't really need it because we see our goal so clearly, like a mountain climber who sees the mountain peak far away and the road leading to it.

But then, during the journey there are times when the peak is shrouded in dense fog or some more alluring and easier paths appear along the way. In our life's journey, sooner or later come the moments of allure of other values, haziness, weakness, temptations, dryness, and distractions. Options will come and these options will seem to be better because of their intensity and accessibility. And that is when the map becomes indispensable because the choices laid before us have made it difficult to follow the best path to reach our goal.

That is the time to focus on the map and be faithful to following it. The map tells us that the peak although hidden is still there. We trust in the commitment we have made (map) when the road we have chosen is not seen clearly at the moment. Then we realize that those other roads may look better but better only for the moment and will not take us where we have chosen to go. Remaining steadfast in our commitments no matter what happens will lead us to make the right decisions that will help us reach our goal.

We trust that the commitment will bring us to our destination. It therefore protects the chosen road that God has offered us. This faithfulness to one's commitment is what will bring us most intimately and securely to God at the end of the journey, one will be forever grateful, fulfilled, and at peace because he has followed faithfully his map (commitment).

CHAPTER VI

Lifeline

Returning to my own journey, it must be remembered that at this time of formation, my 23 companions and I could only leave the seminary once every two months to enjoy a weekend with our respective families. My former worldly consolations when I was bored or restless outside of the seminary like watching movies, enjoying the company of my girlfriend, strolling in the mall, having a drink with my brothers, browsing through bookstores, watching betamax (this was before DVD), eating my favorite food, buying clothes and other stuff, traveling out of town, and the like could not be done anymore to fill up my need for stimulation and consolation, especially in a quiet and peaceful environment like the seminary. Sometimes, while lying on my spring bed on Saturday nights, I would imagine what I would be doing at this time if I were still outside; lights out in the seminary which was at 10:30 would only be the beginning of the night life outside. The “old man” in me was not yet dead and was rebelling against the new lifestyle and environment that was supposed to create the “new man” in me.

My experience can be compared with that of a romantic couple at the stage when the romance starts to wear off due to the constant exposure to one another; they then begin to lose interest with each other when before, they could not even take their eyes off each other. Unless the couple moves beyond the external and the superficial (which is centered only on the emotions), they will never get to know the truth about each other and true love will never develop.

With my brothers in our ancestral home (from left to right): Tommy, myself, Joel, Martin, and Jofe

Likewise, in the spiritual life, it is only when one has truly learned solitude (a loving aloneness with God developed through a lifestyle of prayer), that God begins to touch not only the emotions, but the spirit as well. It is here that the attraction and pull of the world with its many varied pleasures dissipates. We always see this reality in the lives of the saints. When I was just beginning formation, I had to seek the grace of God so that I would be able to persevere, to the point of truly learning and loving solitude (the promised land where one's former world cannot even compare to the joys and fulfillment found there).

The most challenging time therefore for a new seminarian is when the novelty of the seminary experience starts to wear off before he has learned to love and value solitude. A seminarian begins to enter into solitude when he begins to experience in the here-and-now of the seminary, the reality of God in his present particular life situation, and feels that God's love is now being personally directed to him in a very particular and unique manner. The joy and peace of this meeting of hearts aid in the detachment process of the seminarian, from the world and its pleasures and in the seeking of an ever more intense life of solitude. In solitude, the seminarian discovers a joy and fulfillment far beyond what the pleasures of the world can offer and his heart is both contented and fulfilled.

Teaching

My struggle with the feelings for my ex-girlfriend was disturbing because the intensity of this longing for her was just beyond anything I expected. The loneliness and the desire for female intimacy and affection continued to become more and more powerful each day that it reached a point where I told myself, "I won't make it to the end of the year, it's just too heavy and emotionally painful." But God, who was watching me with compassion just as he was also watching the journey

of all my companions, granted me the greatest of his gifts to rescue me.

One day, while I was still struggling, I browsed over the cover of the different magazines in the large and modern seminary library; a topic, in one of the covers caught my eye; it dealt with loneliness and the priest. I opened the magazine with an eager curiosity and started reading. Something struck me that would forever affect my spiritual life. It said in one portion of the article, “All men need a female presence in their lives; for the priest celibate, this womanly presence is none other than Mary.” Yes, I prayed the rosary every day but up to that time, I never had a real personal relationship with Mama Mary. The rosary was merely an obligation that I had to fulfill; I never saw that it was a doorway to encounter the Mother of God.

I made up my mind then and there to begin to make her more a part of my life as a seminarian; I just knew that I would not survive seminary training without her.

So I started really talking to her during rosary time, asking and pleading for her love and presence in my life; I would ask her to continually hug me and suffuse my heart with her love so that the seemingly unnatural (since I never had this kind of emotional pain before) longing for female intimacy would be healed and filled. I would imagine her hugging me during rosary time, knowing that she always hastens to answer our needs. After almost exactly a month, all those emotional longings and loneliness just suddenly dissipated and I was again my normal more stable self. This was really a time when I realized that Mama Mary is truly very much alive and active in the lives of her children, that she is merely waiting expectantly for us to invite her into our lives, and the beautiful thing is, when she comes, she always brings Jesus along.

Our Blessed Mother truly loves us as a people. Young people are surprised when I mention that Our Lady of EDSA is founded on a real miraculous apparition that happened during the EDSA revolution. I myself learned this story around this time in my seminary formation and the source of the story is none other than the late Jaime Cardinal Sin who was then Archbishop of Manila. This marvelous event happened during the confrontation between the soldiers (Marines) who were trying to disperse the crowd and the countless persons who made up the crowd, persons from all walks of life and from varied age groups. People were in the streets because of the request of their beloved Cardinal that a group of rebels holed up at a military compound needed to be protected from military annihilation. Thousands and thousands of people were praying to God and our Blessed Mother for help that the confrontation would not turn into a bloodbath; rosaries were seen everywhere as well as beautiful statues of Mama Mary. During those

tense moments, the people imploring aid from heaven did not realize that their faith and trust were about to be answered. The marine soldiers inside the first APC (Armored Personnel Carrier), around five of them, were already ready to fire into the crowd (this was later narrated by the soldiers themselves to the Cardinal) when suddenly out of nowhere, they saw a beautiful lady floating above the crowd in front of them! She said only these few words, “Do not shoot! These are my children! Do not shoot.” The terrified soldiers were dumbstruck with fear and wonder; they were so shaken by the experience that they all left their military vehicle and ran straight to the Cardinal, at his residence in Villa San Miguel, to tell him what they had witnessed; all five of them! Our Blessed Mother was truly present in a very tangible way during those fateful days at EDSA; her maternal presence brought about the peaceful resolution of those very tense and dangerous moments in our history as a nation. It is therefore most appropriate that we, as a people, honor her intercession with the title of Our Lady of EDSA.

She truly loves all of us, together as a nation and individually as her children. I did not realize it then that my initial tangible experience of Mama Mary’s intercession for me many years ago would later manifest in a showing of her great power and intimate love that would continuously protect me and which would sometimes literally save my life in my battle against the fallen angels. But that comes much later.

With my mom and dad

CHAPTER VII

Solitude

After a few months in the seminary, around the months of November or December, I vividly remember walking alone amidst the lush and colorful garden of the seminary; this time of the year the air among the trees was already cool and the day seemed just perfect. Christmas was just around the bend and the birds were singing among the many trees that surrounded the garden. I could smell the fresh morning air that rustled the leaves on the trees. It was then, while walking among the trees and plants that I discovered to my surprise that the vacuum or meaninglessness that I had in my heart when I was still working was gone. I felt at that moment that I was truly fulfilled and at peace. I was truly in the "promised land"; I was experiencing real solitude. Because of the lack of worldly diversions and distractions, God had become my All and he filled my heart with his consolations. My joys had also become very simple and childlike that I could walk and truly enjoy the simple objects of nature around me and experience God in them. From the superficial, temporary sensible pleasures of the world to the deep spiritual joys coming from the heart of God himself: what a difference! Yet this was just the beginning touches of God's love to those who leave everything behind to follow him.

Teaching

The Lord can touch us through the many consolations that he gives us through the senses and the emotions. But the most intimate touches of God can only be felt by the soul. If we have ever gone through a week-long retreat where prayer was easy and silence was comforting, we experience deep in our souls, a certain joy and peace. But as we leave the retreat center and go back to our everyday life in the world, this "sense" of God's presence easily dissipates and then we again become victims of our many moods which are dependent on the circumstances

that we encounter. The touches of the Holy Spirit deep in one's soul come and start very softly and subtly and can easily be lost if we do not make any attempt to remain recollected. But in a place of quiet and prayer, like a convent or seminary, one can become more and more sensitive to these divine touches because it is easier to maintain a recollected spirit (a spirit focused on God). We must remember that God is pure spirit, and to be able to truly and intimately experience him, our spiritual faculties (soul) should, in a sense, be given time and space to experience him. Our emotions will always fall short in trying to know God who is pure spirit because our emotions are rooted in the senses, which can only get in touch with the material and physical.

It is especially through a persevering and a continuing development of one's prayer life that one develops a sensitivity to the Divine Presence as well as to his touches and inspirations. St. Teresa of Avila details the different stages in the development of prayer and that if one is faithful, one can reach the heights of true mystical prayer (the prayer of the saints) wherein supernatural manifestations are even exhibited by the body (like levitation) due to the intense presence of God in the soul. This happens when a person has reached a degree of prayer that is ecstatic in nature; the initial soft and subtle touches of the Holy Spirit in the soul have now reached the point where they become a raging flame. The praying person experiences an ecstasy so great that without the grace of God, the person would literally die out of love.

When the soul has reached this stage of prayer, nothing at all can disturb its deep peace and spiritual joy even as it goes about its daily duties and occupations. This is when we say one's work has become also one's prayer. A real and tangible presence of God is continually felt in the soul.

Therefore we see that in the lives of the saints, although they would be suffering from every kind of difficulty of mind, emotions, and body, they remain deeply joyful and at peace; a sign that the Holy Spirit is now fully aflame within the soul.

What is amazing is that God calls each of us to this deep intimacy with him found in mystical prayer. What a great gift! But how many of us really know how to pray authentically? How many of us know how to develop real prayer life? How many can persevere through dryness and distractions? How many try to find the time and place to be able to truly pray? A seminary is a place designed to foster this development of intimacy with God in prayer so that the heights of the spiritual life are reached.

A person who has too much of the "world," that is, a person who allows his body and emotions to be catered with all kinds of pleasures and worldly delights, who is surrounded by worldly noise and loud

music, and who finds no time for God in prayer due to his many concerns will not be able to become receptive to the sensitive movements of God in the soul.

As St. Francis de Sales states, “Those who are rich in the world’s pleasures are incapable of spiritual delights.”

A mortified body, a recollected spirit, and a developing prayer life that is comfortable in solitude (being alone with God) are necessary to be able to truly experience the peaceful and joyful presence of God (a “sense” of the presence of God).

Seminary formation is truly challenging; all stimulations and pleasures that has continually distracted and has catered to the self-centered “old man” in us are suddenly not there anymore. The seminary puts the person in an environment wherein he either starts to seek what is spiritual, the God and other-centered “new man,” or ends up restless, bored, and unfulfilled. A seminarian has to be accustomed to silence and aloneness to become sensitive to the gentle presence of God.

CHAPTER VIII

Journeying

Mid-1990s

Around the middle of the 1990s I completed my collegiate years of formation in the Philosophy Department and was then in the Theologate or the Theology Department (it can be compared to medicine proper) where I was undergoing the last five years of seminary formation. How fast time flies!

During this time, I was learning subjects that would directly benefit me as a priest; Dogma, Morals, Spirituality, Biblical Theology, Pastoral Counseling, Homiletics, Liturgy, Canon Law, and the like. As when I was in the Philosophy Department, I was being formed in the five areas or pillars of seminary training: the human, spiritual, pastoral, intellectual, and communitarian dimensions. Of course, the intensiveness of the formation in these areas was much greater in this department. During this time, I had many beautiful experiences especially in my moments of prayer and solitude. I especially enjoyed the yearly retreats in Tagaytay (especially in the Canossian House of Spirituality); the silence, the recollection, and the peace that came were truly enlivening. God was allowing me to grow in my experience of him. I also made it a habit to visit Jesus in the oratory before I went to bed each night.

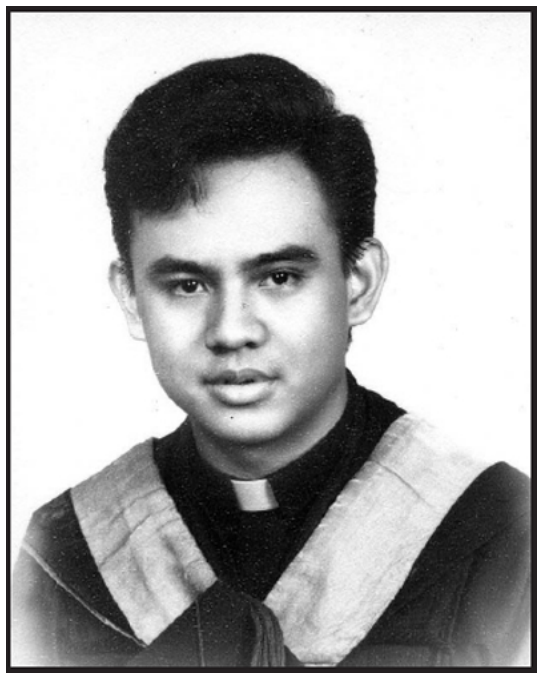
I had formed deep bonds of friendship among my co-seminarians from the Theology Department, and many times I would visit them in their rooms to chat until the late hours of the night. I really enjoyed and missed those nightly sharings especially with my best friend, Alex (he is now married and living in the US). Friendships formed in the seminary last a lifetime and are much deeper than friendships formed in the world; try living with someone 24 hours a day, every day for many years.

The academics were quite demanding and I had to spend a lot of time down in our damp and dark refectory (dining hall) cooking and eating,

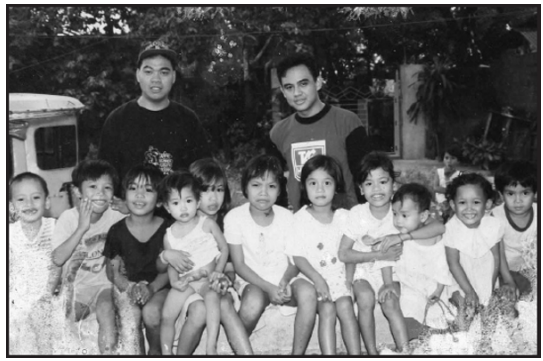
with other seminarians, late night snacks to keep me awake to be able to continue reading, analyzing, and memorizing. And, of course, I gained a lot of weight during this time. I still remember those days with nostalgia eating instant spaghetti and pancit canton late into the night and we would step out of the refectory for the break and walk into the cool night air and share stories.

Although I enjoyed most of the subjects because they dealt with topics that would have a direct bearing when I become a priest, the subjects I most enjoyed were Pastoral Psychology, Pastoral Counseling, and Spiritual Theology. Little did I know that many years later I will be teaching all these same subjects to a younger batch of wide-eyed seminarians.

We had varied apostolates and immersion programs in the parishes in and outside the Archdiocese of Manila, to train us for pastoral work and to help us attain the heart of a shepherd. This was a time of adventure and for experiencing new and exciting things. I remember that during the weekends, we were assigned to an area that was quite rural. I formed many friendships there and until now I still have contact with these simple and loving people. This area where I was assigned for two years had a sort of “island” that we had to reach by boat!



Graduating from San Carlos Major Seminary, Philosophy Department



Seminary formation in the squatters' area

I vividly imagined myself to become like one of the early missionaries, in their white cassocks (soutana) and large jungle hats zealously evangelizing far-flung pagan territories. Among the four of us in the team, one could perform some magic tricks while another could imitate the voice of a favorite mascot character; of course, this attracted large groups of children. Sometimes, I stood watching in the background with "envy" since I had no special talent to attract the kids; I didn't believe that doing martial arts moves (my lifetime hobby) with punches, kicks, and samurai sword play would attract them and besides, it would be strange for a seminarian to attract children this way.

I would notice my other companion, Alex, who had also no special talent to attract kids, and I could sense the same "envy" as he stood in the background week after week.

I bought books on magic (not magick!) and practiced some tricks of illusion; I was even tempted to ask my brother Jofe (he had talent here) to teach me some magic tricks; but in the end, it was just too draining for me to learn something I had no aptitude for.

At least I was more successful in evangelizing the Legion of Mary in the parish. Well, to each his own.

With regard to our physical development, the seminary had a lot of time for sports and recreation where bonding and social values could be learned. I was not that active during sports time because my sports were swimming and the martial arts (as I mentioned) which during that time in the seminary, there were no means to apply them. Although today as a formator in the seminary, I have included Arnis in the curriculum especially now that it has become our national sport. But at least it was during this time that I learned to play a new game—ping-pong (table tennis).

During intramurals, where basketball, which I dreaded, would usually be one of the main competitive events, those in charge of the events, would make sure that I played in the game, even when I was a new

seminarian knowing that I would again make a fool of myself and give the other seminarians a good laugh. I once bought a book on this sport but gave up trying to learn through it since I knew that only by actually playing basketball would I ever become proficient and I knew that it would take off years of my life just learning to dribble properly. I also had to hide the book on basketball because if seminarians see it, they would make fun of me, for sure.

With regard to human formation, there were so many activities in the seminary that fostered one's initiative and creativity that is why seminarians in general tend to be persons who could adapt and thrive in any situation or environment. The goal of human formation is to develop the human maturity of the seminarian; one cannot be a holy priest without first being a good and mature individual, as the saying goes, "Grace builds on nature."

As part of human formation, my classmates and I were given leadership responsibilities since the ultimate goal of all our training was to be future spiritual leaders or shepherds. A priest in the Archdiocese of Manila would normally handle a parish consisting of 20,000 parishioners which could even reach as high as 120,000! I was given some leadership positions which I tried to fulfill to the best of my ability. To augment my leadership skills, I tried reading good material on the topic and apply them to my committee or group. Even today, I have difficulty resisting buying and reading good books on leadership.

We had a lot of processing with regard to our human development; the focus was not only facilitating growth but also discovering the blocks and immaturities in our developing psychological maturity and then healing and transcending them. This was where one could experience a lot of pain; one was challenged to look at the deepest and darkest areas in one's life, those areas where one has difficulty looking at and then accepting, areas that were even being repressed. After discovering these shadow areas, we were challenged to bring them to the light so that they could be processed and integrated. To deny, defend, or overlook them meant that they could resurface (especially during stressful moments of one's life) at a much later time with disastrous consequences especially when one is already ordained a priest.

To further enhance our spiritual and psychological development, we had a one-year academic-free program called the PSI year or Pastoral Spiritual Integration year. It began after the second year in the Theology Department. It was a year lived outside the seminary and within the confines of a squatter community. It had as its goal both the development of our personhood as well as our pastoral skills and attitudes.

During this one-year journey, I enjoyed the time spent with my classmates; we really grew together as brothers sharing joys, pains, tears, laughter, struggles, and triumphs. There were around a dozen of us living together in that one house especially built for the program.

Of course, for me, there were many challenges to be faced. It was not easy living a very deprived existence in that pastoral assignment, especially since I was the class president in a situation which I had never experienced. The heat, noise, mud, dust, pollution, mosquitoes, and lack of personal living space in a small one-storey bungalow were truly a challenge for me.

Aside from that, there was the presence of some not-so-good elements of society; there were frequent drunkenness, drugs, rampant fights which sometimes occurred in front of us and with bladed weapons, once I was even challenged by a drunk because I was holding my arnis sticks (after training) and there was also a salvaged victim whose body was dumped nearby.

But what gave me a lot of consolation and joy were the majority of the people especially the children; they were happy, kindhearted, very accommodating, and generous in many ways. They also had a deep love for God and the Church. I often related and even played with the children from that place. I also taught martial arts to the youth from the area, trying to give them in the process a sense of self-worth and confidence. My batch and I often went around the squatter area befriending and evangelizing the simple and friendly people of the place. I will always thank God for allowing me to experience the love of these people.

I'm sure my classmates experienced their own personal struggles especially when it was my turn to do the cooking; I remember once cooking barbecued chicken, with Alex assisting me (hence it was not entirely my fault), which was burned on the outside and raw in the inside. My classmates, in order not to hurt my feelings, ate with seeming gusto the half-cooked chicken; but what gave them away were their faces which were pitiable combination of lips that were smiling but eyes that were emotionless and watering.

After a few weeks, because I could no longer stand my ineptness as a cook, I rushed to our kitchen when I went home and asked our cook to teach me how to cook properly. This paid off because weeks later, when my batchmates ate again my concoctions (not anymore experiments), I could see their contented and genuine smiles.

The greatest challenge for me during the program was confronting myself. I had a lot to confront myself with during this time of intensive exploration and processing of the self. With the aid of the many seminars and workshops plus the environment itself, the Lord allowed

me to see little by little the areas in my life that had still to be purified and developed. It was not easy for me, but in the end, with the grace of God, I survived the year.

By this time, out of the original batch of 24 who entered the seminary with me in the Formation Year Department, less than half remained, some left of their own accord while the others were asked to either leave temporarily (also called regency) because they were not yet mature enough to maximize the training in the seminary but most were asked to leave permanently, meaning, that they were to search for their vocation elsewhere. My cousin, Owen, who had entered with me had already left the seminary in order to migrate with his family to Australia. In the end, only three of us would become priests from the original 24 who entered the seminary in 1989. Truly, prayer for vocations is of utmost importance still in our Church. May the Lord of the harvest grant us more laborers in his vineyard of souls.

Teaching

Seminary training is not like any ordinary training institution or even similar to a military training. It is much more than that; the greatest moments in formation is when God "breaks through" and starts to tangibly manifest himself to the seminarian. Here, a seminarian is given the capacity to "see" more clearly the God who loves him and who is so closely journeying with him in the ordinary circumstances of day-to-day life.

God has journeyed with me through the thick and thin of my seminary formation and there were many times that he broke through in a tangible manner during my daily life in the seminary. These were moments in my life where God manifested himself in ways that to me were small miracles and which bolstered my confidence regarding his caring presence. I would like to relate a few of these moments as my way of thanking God for these epiphanies.

The Class

When I was taking a particular philosophy subject called Logic, the priest professor, knowing that I had already completed my philosophy units at UST, tended to make me an example of how the products of this university were in a way "superior." The reason was that he had finished his seminary formation at the UST Central Seminary, and with the highest honors. Whenever no one in the class could answer a difficult question which was taken from the textbook, he would, with a certain sense of pride, call on me to answer, expecting that I would

always be able to do so. He was a very strict professor and the entire class was in dread of him since he expected always the best from us and did not tolerate mediocrity. He was what one would call a “terror professor.” You would see this intolerance on his face and in his voice whenever a seminarian failed to meet his standards in class. But outside of class, he was very friendly to the seminarians.

I was also in dread of this thin bespectacled priest especially when I knew that he would be calling me any moment after the entire class could not answer the questions in the textbook. During those moments, the room would seem to close in on me and my body and soul would desire to be anywhere else but in this now seeming “prison.” For me, his confidence in me was misplaced since if he had checked my grades when I was still studying philosophy, he would have noticed that they were not that great since my time in college was spent between my *barkada* and my political activities—rallying at Mendiola, being tear-gassed by the police, boycotting classes, running from the authorities, and what not.

But such is life. From the beginning of the semester, he would start calling each seminarian row-by-row and if by chance a large number of seminarians would not be able to answer the question, he would call out my name to answer it. My seatmate, now Fr. Jeff, would mimic my professor, whenever no one could answer the question and say “Syquia!” Sure enough, I would then hear my last name called out by the now impatient red-faced professor. I was seated in the back row of the classroom and during difficult questions from the professor I would slouch and hide behind the person in front of me, hoping my vanishing act would save me from being called; of course, it never did.

This is where I discovered in a very tangible manner the power of the Holy Spirit. Of course, before the class, I would always study but there were truly difficult questions in the textbook that even if one reviewed, one would find it almost impossible to answer. Logic spells out the rules for right thinking that can be easily memorized but applying its principles is entirely another matter.

Anyway, all the time, when none of my classmates could answer these difficult questions, I would already be praying with heartfelt sincerity to the Holy Spirit to inspire me with the answer. And miracle of miracles, I would suddenly “see” the answer in the textbook moments before I would hear my name being called out. Half of the time, whenever my name was called, I would not yet even know the answer, and these were truly very tense moments for me and so I would double the intensity of my prayer to the Holy Spirit. Wonder of wonders, the moment I was on my feet, the answer would just suddenly miraculously “appear” in my head which, of course, I would blurt out excitedly and which would

again bring a smile to the face of my priest-professor.

There was even one occasion wherein a question was so difficult that even my professor could not find the correct answer, and he called on me, hoping that maybe, just maybe, I knew it. Of course, I didn't; as I was starting to rise from my seat, I prayed as usual and again with much more intensity to the Holy Spirit. And by the time I was fully on my feet, the answer came to my mind. I saw the look of doubt then awe on my professor's face as he realized I was correct and he twisted and turned the pages of the textbook as though trying to discover how I found the answer when he himself could not.

At the end of the semester, I got a perfect grade and all I can say is that whenever I prayed to the Holy Spirit those countless times, I always, always, got the correct answer! The Lord here was teaching me that the Holy Spirit is truly alive and always ready to assist with his infinite power if we but have faith and trust in him. That is why the saints always prayed to him whenever they were confronted with a duty or work that they had to fulfill. St. Thomas Aquinas always prayed when he studied and wrote, hence we see here the source of the greatness of his mind and his works. Today, I always pray to the Holy Spirit before I write homilies, give talks, teach classes, do counseling and spiritual direction, celebrate the Mass, visit the sick and before I confront a demoniac; without the Holy Spirit, one would only be bringing oneself, and therefore, fail miserably. But lest a student and seminarian think that one need not study for one's classes but merely pray, remember that grace builds on nature. The Holy Spirit aided me during those times to teach me the important lesson that I will never be a good seminarian without him and that he will surely aid us if we do our part; remember I mentioned that I always studied my lessons before the class and he provided his help when I had reached the limitations of my intellectual capacities.

The Tooth

What a wonderful privilege to be able to join a pilgrimage tour to the Holy Land and other places of religious significance. I had this great grace from the Lord even when I was still a seminarian; I was traveling with Martin, my brother, and a tour group made up of Filipinos. We had just come from the Holy Land and had visited the many holy sites which were significant in the life of our Lord as he walked the earth around 2,000 years ago. We were then in Yugoslavia making a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, a place wherein our Blessed Mother was said to be appearing to six young people. Everything about the pilgrimage was great but for one major glitch—I had a terrible toothache. The pain was

so excruciating that it was destroying the entire mood of the tour. It was much worse during meal times when I had to chew my food.

I dreaded another week of this tortuous pain, for we still had a week before travelling back home. Then came the morning that we were to celebrate Mass in a nearby church; we were blessed to have three priests with us during the pilgrimage. I was, of course, always the Mass server since I was the seminarian in the group. As the group entered the old church which had a rounded exterior structure, I noticed right away the interior beauty of this old church. It was Byzantine in design, marble all around which added to the coolness of the atmosphere. Its sanctuary was much higher than the rest of the nave where the pews were located. It was not quite as big when compared to other well-known European churches but there was magnificence in its historical and cultural atmosphere manifested by its interior design. The church was called the Church of St. Blaise. St. Blaise is the patron of those who have sicknesses located in the throat area.

As the Mass was beginning, I said a prayer with my heart to St. Blaise, "Dear St. Blaise, I know that you are the patron saint of throats, maybe you could include in your intercession my tooth, since anyway it is quite close to the throat. Please! Please! Please pray for its healing since this whole tour is turning into a purgatory for me. What is worse, I still have to wait one more week before we return to the Philippines and see my dentist."

Right after the Mass, the group headed to a nearby restaurant to eat. And as I sat down (wonder of wonders!), the constant throbbing pain in my tooth was gone just like that. "Was I really healed?" When the food we ordered arrived, I started chewing my food using especially the tooth that had plagued me for the longest time. The pain was truly gone! Then, I started to doubt, "Could it be a coincidence? Maybe there is a natural explanation to the loss of the pain and that it coincided with the moment I prayed." As I was feeding my doubts with even more doubts, I began to become aware of the pain returning to my tooth and so then and there I cried out in my mind, "No, Lord, I believe! I believe! I believe that it was you who healed me through the intercession of St. Blaise!" With that prayer of faith and trust, the returning pain then disappeared as suddenly as it appeared and did not bother me anymore. With that the rest of the pilgrimage became heaven for me. How beautiful and reassuring to know that those closest to God, the saints, are still very much concerned with those of us still struggling on this earth. They are our heavenly allies!

The Book

The coldness and subdued lighting of our auditorium in the theology building reminded me of one of those disco houses of the ’80s, which my brothers and I used to frequent. Our department was celebrating around the end of the school year, an occasion which I can’t remember anymore since celebrations are fairly common in the seminary. Celebrations are common to help build and strengthen our community life. The entire department was present including our priest formators. I was seated with a group of other theologians having some light drinks and eating appetizers while we watched the program prepared by the programs committee.

There were the usual activities found in any seminary program, talent shows from each class, music, inspirational sharings, jokes, and the like; but one part of the program that really interested me was the raffle wherein prizes were being given away.

There were lots of small prizes and were of different sorts but what excited me most was a few set of books being raffled which had to do with the priesthood. I remember that it was a red book and on the front page was a picture of then archbishop of Manila Jaime Cardinal Sin hugging a priest during an ordination. I love reading books especially regarding my vocation and I wanted to have a copy of that book.

Unfortunately, I am a person who has never in my whole lifetime ever won in any raffle draw and I knew in my heart that I would again, as usual, be frustrated.

But what was weird during this particular time was that I had an overwhelming and burning desire, by hook or by crook, to win a copy of this book. I didn’t know where this consuming desire was coming from but it filled my heart with so great a need to have the book.

So when raffle on these few books on the priesthood started, I made one of my most earnest and heartrending prayers to God, “Lord, I know that I never win in any of these kinds of raffle games, I never win anything. But today, I just so much desire to win that particular book on the priesthood. Please, let me win just this one time in my life, please let me win! I never win anything but please, just this one time! It would really mean so much to me and you know this! Please make me happy! I know that nothing is impossible to you! Please just this one time! I place all my trust in your goodness!”

As I finished my prayer, the priest formator who was calling out the numbers started to read the winning ones for the few books on the priesthood. I was a bit tense but surprisingly, I started to feel a certain deep peace and assurance that God had truly heard my prayer and was happy to oblige me with regard to my request. My years in formation had taught me a lot regarding the true face of God and this gave me the joy and peace that I was then experiencing—that God was about to

answer my trusting prayer. And when the priest called out my number and I rose to go up the lighted stage to claim my prize, I was smiling from ear to ear not really because I had won the book, which actually I could have purchased outside at a bookstore, but because of the unimaginable goodness of our Father! He gave me the book!

The Pope

When the Holy Father Pope John Paul II came to the Philippines in 1995 for a second historic visit, San Carlos Seminary was a hotbed of activity since the Pope would be meeting hundreds of bishops from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) at our newly renovated auditorium. We, seminarians, were quite busy in both the administrative and physical preparations. The day of the Pope's coming was just like any other beautiful seminary day, the sun was out and the sky clear; the only difference was the intense excitement and the very palpable tension due to the anticipation of meeting this saintly man of God. Many seminarians and visitors and I in my white cassock (soutana) lined both sides of the street from our seminary gate up to the front staircase leading to the lobby of our main building where the Popemobile would be passing through.

Then came the moment when the tension broke into wild cheers and waving as the white Popemobile approached the old seminary gate. I was to the right of the street facing the gate somewhere in the middle of this long massive throng of waving admirers. Then a weird thought struck me: "There are so many of us waving here, will the Pope even be aware that I exist? Will he even know that I am here?" As this thought of my insignificance amidst this mass of devotees crossed my mind, the Popemobile was already traveling almost perpendicular to where I was standing, shoulder-to-shoulder with the seminarians who were by then also wildly cheering and frantically waving. As the vehicle carrying the Pope passed by, yes, my excitement was there but the thought of my insignificance made me forget to wave and cheer; I just stood there gazing at this holy man with a rosy white face radiating warmth, light, and peace. I do not know, maybe it was because I was the only person in the crowd not waving, in fact not moving, amidst all the pandemonium around me which caught the Pope's attention. All I knew was that he suddenly turned his head to the side and looked at me straight into my eyes! I was gazing at his eyes and his eyes were gazing into mine! His face seemed to say, "Are you alright?" I tried as quickly as possible to raise my arms to wave, but it was too late; the wave came out more like a clumsy karate chop! It was quickly over, as the Popemobile passed me by but the imprint of that penetrating look, of those kindly eyes, of this

man of God turning to look at me, will remain with me till the day I die. The Pope noticed me! I who thought was just a nobody in the crowd, a mere number suddenly felt my uniqueness, my individuality. How good God is! He seemed to tell me, “There may be billions of people on the earth, but I love each one of you with a love that is deeply personal, unique, intimate, and infinite.

When I was in Rome a few years back as a priest, I was privileged to meet again and in person the beloved Pope John Paul II; I accompanied Bishop Soc Villegas and Msgr. Rolly De La Cruz in a private audience. I was carrying some religious items, placed in a cheap blue unsightly plastic bag, to be blessed. This was an assignment given to me by Bishop Buhain; the religious articles belonged to some of the Church workers assigned in Quiapo Church. During that time, the secretary of the Pope gave me instructions to place the bag down at the Pope’s feet so that they may be blessed while I would receive a rosary from his hands; he then instructed all three of us regarding the other usual protocols. I was wearing a black soutana, prim and proper and very formal, except for the cheap plastic bag that I was holding.

When came the anticipated moment to enter the majestic hall where the Pope was, I gathered all my composure to remain calm and collected. Sadly, when I came face-to-face with this living saint, I was in so much awe that I forgot all the protocols to be observed when approaching the Pope, hence I continued carrying this unattractive blue plastic bag of religious articles all the time, even while I was kneeling in front of him. Actually, I carried it during the entire papal audience as shown in all my pictures taken during those moments. These very formal pictures in a formal setting with the very out-of-place cheap-looking bag caused a good laugh from Bishop Soc but my very formal father who later saw those pictures was not pleased. He said that it looked like I was carrying some sort of bassinet and offering it to the Pope.

The two times Pope John Paul II acknowledged my existence, and I acted weird!

CHAPTER IX

Purification

Late 1990's

There came another painful crisis in my later years in formation, which I suddenly felt and experienced. There were two reasons for this. First, there was a growing pride in me. What were the symptoms that showed that all was not well? I was becoming more aware that life in the seminary was becoming more and more difficult and burdensome. And this reality started to put doubts with regard to my vocation.

I was confused why this was happening. I thought I was doing everything that was asked of me by my formators in the seminary to the best of my ability.

The answer? I was to discover later that I was becoming puffed up with pride. The years that had passed saw me getting the best grades in academics and the evaluations from my formators were always excellent; I was looked up to and respected by my fellow seminarians. They saw high hopes for my future.

The crux of the problem was that during this time, even though I continued to thank the Lord for his graces that allowed me to excel in seminary formation, deep down, throughout all my struggles and efforts, I began little by little to believe that it was through my own efforts that I was where I was, that I deserved to be where I was. I had worked hard year in and year out to be where I was!

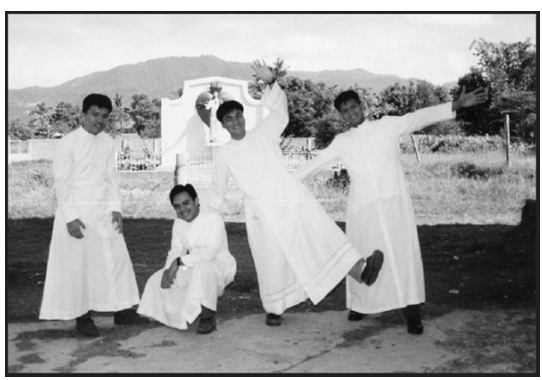
Pride is like a small child who walks but does not see the hands of a parent supporting him from behind. He shows off and says he needs no one to help him walk; he, of course, fails to develop any form of gratitude and acknowledgment of the parent sustaining him from behind. A loving relationship between the child and the parent can never develop in this scenario. What would the parent do to correct this situation? God allowed me to experience how it would be without his consoling presence to wake me up to the reality that all was possible

because of his grace! That it was he who was sustaining and giving me joy in seminary formation. St. Thérèse of Lisieux tells us that even the basic belief that God exists comes from God's grace! He loved me so much that he allowed me to fall so that I may again turn my eyes back to him in humility and gratefulness.

The second reason for the crisis at this point in my life was centered on my motivation or more specifically my purity of intention for being in the seminary. My motivation was becoming more and more impure; that is, my vocation had unconsciously started to move away from God as its center, and turned to myself!

Now how did this occur? First, when I began experiencing affirmation within the seminary walls regarding my achievements, I not only relished in them, I even started to seek them out. The worldly values of prestige, status, accolade, and ambition became important for me so much so that I had unknowingly moved radically away from focusing on knowing, loving, and serving God.

The call for self-transcendence (a love relationship with God) was slowly being replaced with the desire for self-fulfillment in the seminary; a self-fulfillment rooted in the world and the flesh although disguised with religious trappings. I was doing a lot of holy things but not doing things holily. I became a self-absorbed person looking out only for myself and my advancement!



Seminarians doing apostolate in Palawan

It must be remembered that in the seminary only the relational dimension with our loving Father can bring about authentic joy, peace, and fulfillment which make the crosses and challenges of seminary formation light and easy.

All other consolations will never sustain a seminarian as he undergoes the intensive training to be a future leader of God's Church. Only the grace of God in the soul will sustain and bring joy to a vocation to the priesthood! Because of pride and self-centeredness, I myself was cutting

the lifeblood of my vocation. A vacuum was again created in my soul!

So, little by little, temporary and superficial pleasures were replacing the deep and permanent joys coming from God. Worldly "values" were slowly creeping into my motivations for remaining in seminary formation. And the more I lacked the grace of God to grant joy and meaning in my formation, the more I sought out these worldly consolations.

As was mentioned, the seminary does not cater to please the old worldly man in us; the old man in us seeks only the sensible pleasures found in the world. The isolation, austerities, discipline, and schedules inherent in the seminary structure will never fulfill the worldly man. The seminary discipline is made to build up, nourish, and give joy to the spirit which is supposed to be developing in the seminarian, the new man in Christ, a man of the Spirit.

Hence when I began using all my energies in trying to continue finding worldly consolations such as prestige, ambition, and status within the seminary walls, the new man in me was left malnourished and dying.

God's love for us and our love for him is what makes seminary training light and joyful. God's love for us nourishes us and is the stable foundation for continued strength in following the Lord. Without it, burnout comes quickly. Also love for God must be our foremost motivation in following his call; it is like a married couple, when one of them does not truly love the other; then everything becomes "obligatory" and burdensome. When love was not anymore the primary priority for me, the structure and schedules in the seminary became truly heavy and demanding, and a dangerous cycle started. In order to compensate for this heaviness in my heart, I sought out more the consolations of the world within the confines of the seminary walls.

My religious life at this point had become more of mere formalism and legalism (merely outward observance) since the pure motive of love which also allowed me to be nourished by Love itself was deficient. What had become the central focus of my training was showing off that I was the "best seminarian." I myself had built up walls that were blocking the love and presence of God that he desired to nourish me with; God would never force himself on someone who does not truly desire him.

But God is truly merciful; he allowed me to undergo this crisis to bring to the light these selfish and worldly realities in my life that were undermining my relationship with him. Only painful honesty coupled with a repentant and humbled heart saved me and my vocation. It was a difficult and long journey back to being and living as a true child of the Father (which would take a few chapters to go into the details), but it

was infinitely worth it.

I remember a dream that I had at that time. In that dream I felt a large hole in my being and I experienced a deep loneliness and vacuum in my life; then a deep inspiration hit me that made me aware that this deep hole in my heart could only be filled by God. I mentioned this later to my spiritual director, Msgr. Jess Mercado (now bishop of Parañaque) and he told me that this was a great gift from the Lord; it was a message of utmost relevance.

Teaching

A lesson that I learned was that the adage, "Where you are happy is where you are called," can be dangerous if it is obeyed without qualifying the terms involved. Whenever I asked people "whether we were created first and foremost by God to be happy," the answer I usually get is positive. I tell them that they are wrong. God created us first and foremost to be holy, that is, to answer his invitation to transcend ourselves in order to give ourselves in love to him; happiness is merely the effect of this union with God. If I say I want to become a priest in order to be happy first and foremost, then this is a self-centered motive. The danger comes in when the priest now uses his ministry to find the happiness that he never found in his life in the world. A pure motive would be that a person desires to become a priest because he loves God and desires to dedicate his entire life to loving him and those God loves. The priest is therefore neither focused on himself nor has any self-centered motives but he chooses to go out of himself to give himself as a gift to God and others; since we were created not to be absorbed with ourselves but to love God and be united with him, this giving of oneself brings about fulfillment and joy to the truly giving person. We see here that his primary motive is the "other": to love the other and bring joy to the other, not to himself; happiness is merely the fruit. So when one is truly holy then one also becomes truly happy.

Another important point to remember is the idea of what true happiness is, when using the adage, "Go where you will be happy," in discerning the will of God. We have to properly qualify this happiness because one could mean the happiness that comes from the pleasures of the world and of the senses, the happiness that fulfills the old man in us. If this is the happiness the discerning person has in mind, then the adage, "Go where you are happy" is wrong. Then no one would become a priest because the priesthood is a life of sacrifice and self-giving, a dying to oneself, to the old man in us. Being a priest requires that one is able to renounce the many pleasures of the senses and of the world and have the prudence and temperance towards those that are allowed.

The proper questions when making choices in life should be: “Where can I truly love? Where can I truly glorify and please God? Where can I truly become a saint? Where can I truly be holy?” The choice one makes after proper discernment will be where you will find true happiness; but it is not the happiness of the senses and of the world but the happiness that is from God; we call this type of happiness, joy. It is spiritual, peaceful, and truly deep. This joy remains in a person even though he may find himself under difficult external circumstances and trials, as seen during the time of the martyrs. The search for true happiness should be the search for this spiritual joy that comes from God which when discovered is the will of God. “Go where you will be happy,” should mean seeking the joy which comes from God and which is the fruit of living a life meaningful and pleasing to God; a life of authentic love.

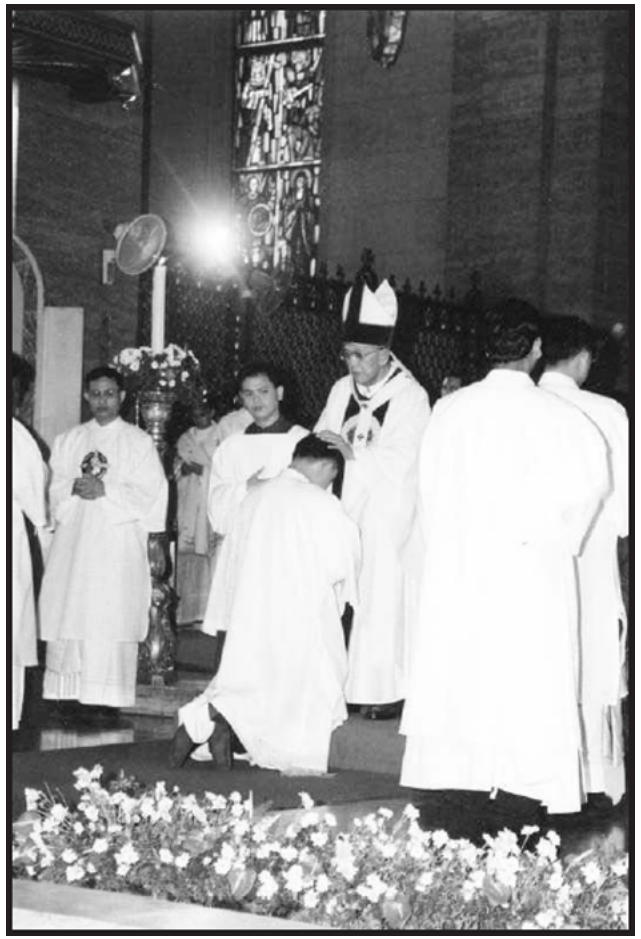
CHAPTER X

Called

2000

I had “last minute jitters” as my ordination drew near. A number of fears old and new and doubts regarding my vocation suddenly came up. Knowing who I was and what I was called to become seemed so daunting that I got scared. Could the Lord really be calling me, a person, weak and with so many failings? Did I really have what it takes to become a holy priest (here I was, relying again on myself)? I, in a sense, could not believe that God would call me to the heights of the priesthood.

I was at the junction of making a lifelong commitment and I was filled with worry and anxiety.



Ordained to the priesthood by His Eminence Jaime Cardinal Sin

With my parents after my Thanksgiving Mass

Looking back now, it seemed that these fears were a combination of the natural fear of making a lifelong commitment, the spiritual last minute attacks of the devil sowing doubt in my heart, and my own realizations of my weaknesses making me feel that I was not ready. These fears also stemmed from my own personality; it was my obsessive compulsive nature coming to the fore.

During the five-day retreat that was to precede my ordination, I really asked the Lord to allay my fears and doubts. I begged the Lord to grant me the grace to hear his voice calling me in order that I may attain the peace and joy of certainty.

I was asking for a “sign” from him that he was truly calling me. Although my spiritual director had already assured me then that I had a vocation, I wanted a sort of certainty from God to remove all anxiety, doubts and tension I felt. If he was truly calling me, then all the graces that I would need to become a holy priest would surely be there.

I was in Tagaytay then in the SVD retreat house, a beautiful place to have a retreat because of its spacious grounds and lush gardens. Classes were over so there were no seminarians; I was totally alone with my thoughts. Walking among the trees and plants, with the cold wind blowing on my face and the many sounds of nature around me, I experienced how soothing and deeply refreshing nature was to my senses. But during the first two days of my five-day retreat, although I was externally experiencing consolation from the beauty around me, deep within me, I was in turmoil; my heart was not at peace trying to make sure whether I was making the right choice in seeking to be ordained a deacon and then six months later, a priest or not. I needed to hear from God; I needed certainty regarding his will.

Foremost in my mind and looming large in my consciousness were my weaknesses of the past and my present limitations. I had to know because if the Lord was calling me, then I had nothing to fear about my weaknesses since he will surely give me the grace to overcome them.

I have reached the third day of my retreat yet no clear answer was forthcoming I was getting anxious, afraid, and interiorly frustrated. I called and begged the Lord while I was in the small dimly lit chapel at the back of the main chapel of the SVD seminary. I asked the Lord for the hundredth time, “Are you truly calling me? Have you truly called me from the beginning? Please erase my doubts; I beg you to grant me a sign that it is not only my own ambition to be a priest but that you have really called me from the beginning!”

Then suddenly out of nowhere, as I was sitting on the pew, bent down with my elbows on my knees, a spark of memory, a swirl of vivid images suddenly flashed through my consciousness. An incident that I had already forgotten for so long came to my imagination and filled my consciousness.

I was again a thin, frail boy of around seven or eight and I was with my family, all seven of us visiting the huge Manila Cathedral; it was the early ’70s. In this kaleidoscope of images long past, I saw again that, as my father and mother with all five of us kids were walking past the large front doors of the huge cathedral, the jolly newly installed Archbishop of Manila, Jaime Cardinal Sin, approached us. Greeting cheerfully my father and mother, whom he knew since my father was president of the Catholic Lawyers Guild, he warmly eyed all five of us boys and said, “You have five boys, why not donate one to the Church?” As my parents took this request in, they laughed and gazed at all five of us trying maybe to guess who they could “give away”; it was then that the cardinal suddenly took off his miter and suddenly placed it on my unsuspecting head. I don’t know how he picked my head since I was quite shy then and would have stood back hiding and away behind my

other brothers who were almost all taller than I. My parents laughed good-naturedly and approvingly while I just smiled sheepishly at having the honor among my siblings of trying on the cardinal's large miter.

Decades later, as I sit alone in that dark chapel in Tagaytay, that simple and very distant memory hit my mind and heart with its significance with the intensity of a thunderbolt from heaven, so much so that tears started flowing down my cheeks, tears of gratitude and relief. I knew in my heart that this was a true inspiration and consolation from God, a truly great grace. All I could mutter, as I sat weeping, were the words, "Thank you, Lord! Thank you! That was what I needed." Then and there, all my fears, doubts, what-ifs, and anxieties vanished like a puff of smoke. "Now I am not afraid! You have called me from the beginning and therefore you will see me through to the end of my life!"

I then confidently and calmly got up from the pew with a deep joy and peace in my heart. The Lord had spoken! And with a resoluteness and zeal in my body and mind that I had not felt for so long, I walked out of that now beautiful quiet chapel to make my commitment to offer to God my life and to serve him faithfully until the end of my days, no matter what.

Teaching

There are lessons I have learned since then: first, never doubt or especially change decisions done in prayer. One must follow through with commitments made in prayer and solitude since it is there that we can be sure that God will speak most clearly to us. Any change in the decision for grave and serious reasons should also be done within the context of prayer. The worse time to entertain doubt or change in decisions is when after prayer we are either emotionally depressed or feeling down or too emotionally high with enthusiasm and zeal. At this stage it will be our emotions and not God doing the deciding. Therefore our decisions at that point would be unreliable and even dangerous. We know the adage, "Never turn a boat around during a storm." When I looked back at my prayer life during my stay in the seminary, I would recall that whenever I would ask the Lord in prayer, within the quiet confines of our seminary oratory, whether he was calling me to be a priest or not, the Lord would constantly confirm through peaceful inspirations that he was. Yet I did not put my trust in his voice but always sought reassurance and even allowed my emotions to put doubt into my head. I thank God for being very patient with me and my presumptions.

Family portrait after my Thanksgiving Mass

CHAPTER XI

Chosen

Rome 2003

I stood gazing and smiling to myself at the vast expanse of greenery behind the residence of Filipino priests studying in Rome, the Pontificio Collegio Filippino. The cool early winter breeze was blowing on my then whitened and chaffed face and I was enjoying every minute of it.

Taking in the entire panorama of colors, the green and brown from the grass and trees surrounding me plus the blue emanating from the midmorning sky was totally invigorating. While inhaling deeply the fresh and cool Italian air, I experienced deep within my heart a sort of haunting nostalgia which only the beauty of nature could bring about and which reverberated within my entire being. If only I could capture this moment and bring it with me forever. I was totally happy and alive and joy reigned in my heart. I was truly at peace with myself and immensely grateful to be alive and a priest of God.

After my ordination, I never stopped thanking God for my life and the vocation he chose for me, the priesthood. (I never had doubts again about my vocation after my ordination.) This priceless gift of my vocation is truly a once-in-a-lifetime privilege of serving him as a shepherd in his Church. I have not only learned to love truly the priesthood but since my ordination, I never stopped growing more and more in love with it. What an adventure to be a priest of God! It truly is the greatest adventure of a lifetime!

If we really understood the priest on earth, we would die not of fright but of love… the priesthood is the love of the Heart of Jesus (St. John Mary Vianney).

Today, I can only smile when I remember all the doubts and fears I had entertained before I was ordained.

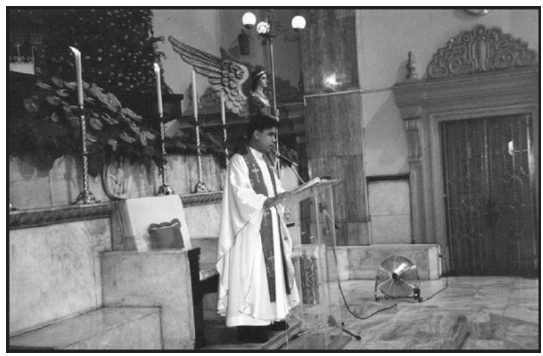
My first assignment after my ordination was to the very busy Quiapo Church, the Shrine of the Black Nazarene, which is at the heart of

Manila. It was there that I had my first encounter with a great number of occult practitioners all found in one place. It was also there that I had my first encounter with a person being oppressed by a demon which, of course, confused and scared me. My pastoral formation never prepared me for this encounter. Before the poor and destitute? Definitely! Before the sick and dying? Of course! Before the grieving? Yes! Before children and the youth? Positively! Before victims of injustice? Yes, also! Before confused teenagers? Absolutely prepared! Before a large agitated demoniac right out of the Bible? Definitely not!

It was only the grace of God, despite myself, that brought about a successful conclusion to this (for me) traumatic encounter. I tried excitedly to call my brother, Martin, to tell him about this encounter; but sadly no one was home at that time.

Anyway, this incident was to be, for me, the start of a journey into the unknown and dark world of the demonic, which, in my wildest dreams I never expected to encounter when I was ordained a priest.

Then from Quiapo, I was assigned by the cardinal to a number of other large parishes across the city as an assistant parish priest, where I learned valuable lessons from my superiors. The parishes I was assigned to were so varied and were situated from one end of the archdiocese to the other end that it was always a new adventure for me each time. The parishioners were generally warm, respectful, and sincere in their faith. Being assigned to different parishes within a short span of time brought a lot of challenges for me; having to adapt to each new situation and different types of people can be daunting. I also had some painful experiences where I encountered the human, wounded, and sometimes unpurified side of the Church from both my brother priests and from the people. It is here where one realizes that to remain consistent with the ideals of one's vocation, one has to focus only on Christ, the High Priest.



Celebrating Mass in Quiapo Church

Studying in the Eternal City

Before long, I was approached by Fr. Greg Gaston, then Dean of Studies of the Graduate School of San Carlos Seminary to teach psychology in the theologate; it was one of the most joyful moments for me as a priest. I felt so much at home teaching in my old alma mater and being with idealistic young men who understood fully my "world." I loved sharing my learnings and hopefully exciting stories with them and was happy for their warm responses. I loved to challenge them especially with regard to the life of a priest.

I still enjoy teaching; I believe this is a generational trait since my grandmother was a teacher, my mother was one, my father was a professor of Law; almost all of my brothers also taught at one point in their lives, my eldest brother Jofe teaches medicine, and my two younger brothers Tommy and Joel used to teach Law and legal management.

It was also around this time that I was given an appointment from the Commission on Visions and Extraordinary Phenomena to become their consultant with regard to extraordinary demonic activity; of course, I agreed, thinking, "Anyway, how common is possession these days?" What an understatement!

Anyway, after many months of both teaching and parochial work, I received a formal letter from then Cardinal Sin that he was sending me to Rome for further studies. I told my parents excitedly and prepared myself psychologically.

I was then enjoying the natural sight, smells, and sounds of Rome through the back garden of the Pontifico and enjoying every minute of it. I was not only absorbed in my studies, focusing on seminary formation and experiencing as much as I could the many wonders of the eternal city; I had all the time in the world to be alone with my God—real solitude! Of course, I had a Filipino community that I ministered to; but I met the members of the community only during weekends.

Looking back, Rome was truly a blessing for me, having the time,

apart from my ministry, to again renew and intensify my relationship with God and experience him more deeply within the environment where Christ's Church took roots and blossomed throughout the world.

I wrote a letter, while I was still studying in Rome, which would more or less encapsulate my experience of God as a young priest; I would like to share some excerpts here.

I thank God for calling me to be a priest otherwise I would not have known how to discover this Great Friend. My vocation is Love and nothing can replace this. My vocation is most meaningful because I give meaning to the lives of others…

Rome can also be a haven where, if one wills, he can find the solitude to spend as much time with Jesus; to enjoy his Love…

Jesus, Mama Mary, my Guardian Angel, my patron saints, St. Joseph and St. Francis, have also become very real for me that I have, in a sense, developed a sixth sense to their presence, not finding a better word.

…Jesus has become so real to me that it would be easier for me to disbelieve that I breathe than disbelieve that Jesus is truly present even in the midst of great suffering.

…I would never replace my real experiences of Jesus, his sweet and pleasant presence but also his power and strength.

To be a really and truly holy priest cannot be attained through any human means or method. It cannot be attained even by the most intelligent and gifted person in the world. Why? Because being another Christ is supernatural in its essence. Becoming a holy priest is totally a work of God; it is all grace. This is why humility is so important; it is the main means to attain that which is humanly impossible.

Of course, it must be noted that grace builds on nature and therefore our cooperation is of utmost importance. This is where we find the opportunity to carry our crosses together with Jesus and do battle with him for his Kingdom.

Purifying ourselves so that God's grace may totally transform us to be another Christ is not easy; it is truly the narrow winding road. Becoming a saint especially in today's world is quite challenging but one never lowers the standard given to us by Christ to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. We must always remember that God neither commands nor asks from us the impossible and that the greatest way to glorify God and to please him is to become a saint. Therefore, one can

never use the excuse, “I am only human” to remain lukewarm and mediocre or worse, to remain in sin.

A priest has to keep the ideal of being always holy as his goal in life but he has to focus on it with the eyes of a child, knowing full well that looking at one’s human and personal limitations and weaknesses is merely part of the equation, the much more important element is allowing God to be God in one’s life. One must truly believe in the depths of one’s heart that to become a saint is only possible if one totally believes that everything is grace, that all that is good in this world comes entirely and exclusively from God. He then realizes that it is not through sheer willpower but humility and littleness that he will reach his goal.

Therefore, even after one has lived one’s whole life doing a lot of good, one should thank the Lord, for having used us as his instruments of love only so that he may recompense us at the end of our life with the totality of himself which is the fullness of life. Everything truly is gift and grace.

(Continuation of the Story from Chapter I)

Gathered in a small cluster in an anteroom just beyond the makeshift chapel, the Exorcism team discussed each one’s observations and discernment regarding the frail young possessed girl. There was the expectant silence as each one spoke his assessment. The case had been one that was tied very much to the occult. The young girl was from a family that was very much involved with occult practices such as spellcraft and sorcery. She herself was very psychic and open to the world of spirits. When she was at school, she would communicate and befriend the elementals she “saw.” What’s more, she contacted spirits that she knew were attached to her and commanded them to do her bidding like, for example, hurt a person she hated. She also used curses against her “enemies.” Her case was brought to us because she showed signs of possession such as going into a trance state, rigidity and a stiffening of the body, changes in her facial features and skin color, and slithering on the floor like a snake when confronted with the sacred. People around her would get sick especially those whom she disliked. Paranormal manifestations happened around her like sacred objects would just suddenly break when brought near her.

After all the psychological and spiritual diagnostic requirements were completed, we scheduled the exorcism. While sharing our observations and insights, it was clear that we were dealing with occult spirits; a telling sign was that she was reacting most to the Latin prayers of exorcism that commanded occult spirits.

The mere fact that these spirits seemed obstinate to leave meant that the girl had to do a complete renouncing of her occult practices. She must renounce them more intently than when she had desired and made use of them. I therefore asked Jing that before we continue the exorcism, she should assist the victim to make a more heartfelt and sincere renouncement, which she did.

Amidst the humming of the nearby air conditioner the rest of the team entered into some light talk as a way of relaxing a bit. Fr. Mateo was in a solemn mood but easily smiled and laughed when a funny anecdote was shared, Fr. Jojo was on one side about to fall asleep since being a parish priest of two parishes during the day was no easy feat. The doctor, Cyril, and Joel, the lawyer, were catching up with the latest news since they had not seen each other for quite some time. After some minutes, Jing arrived and gave the thumbs up, meaning, that the girl was then more prepared for the next session. I replaced my stole and told the others that I would as usual do the introductory prayers. The frail girl was seated on a straight-backed white plastic chair with a dazed faraway look on her face.

As the team gathered around her, I sat on her left and told her that I would simply do a blessing. She merely looked and nodded at me absentmindedly. I placed my right hand on her head and whispered the prayers in order not to startle her. She immediately fell into a trance state and her body straightened and stiffened so quickly that she nearly fell off the chair before those around her could react.

Quickly, some of us caught her before she slid off the chair, I motioned to the others that we carry her to the large table that was directly behind us. The air was tense. A table is prepared because the girl had gone into a deep coma-like "sleep." I, holding only her head, and Joel, carrying only her feet, gently placed her straightened body onto the table; her body had become so stiff that only her head and feet were enough to support and carry her entire body horizontally. I was reminded of the rigid catatonic state of the possessed woman in the film, The Exorcism of Emily Rose.

I placed my right hand again on her forehead and continued with my prayers. Minutes ticked by and there was no visible reaction from the possessed; I knew that my prayers were having minimal effect on her. Without delay, I closed my eyes and concentrated on the presence of God; I silently prayed to him from the heart, "Lord, for your great love for this girl please come and assist us, for without you we can do nothing."

At that very instant, the girl broke into a rage, thrashing her body up and down and from left to right while flailing violently her extremities. The group tried their best to hold her down. The victim was screaming and howling in pain and anger. I tried my best to keep my hands on her head while finishing the prayers. I then signaled to Fr. Jojo to take over, using the prayers from the Roman Ritual. As Fr. Jojo began the command

prayers, with Fr. Mateo this time assisting, I detached myself physically and psychologically from the violent scene and started pacing in the room in order to unwind. I scanned the others; they were still all intense and focused. Their resolute faces did not betray what was going on in their minds and hearts as they witnessed the gruesome displays of aggression from a small frail girl.

Fr. Mateo's wizened face exhibited concern and, I believed, pity for the victim as she continued to struggle and scream; Fr. Jojo's face, on the other hand, exhibited the intense concentration needed to command the spirits with authority. The possessed then started moaning and whining as she muttered continually, "I can't take it anymore." Then one of her arms started jerking up and down uncontrollably from the elbow; the girl seemed to attain a certain degree of consciousness at this point because she began to stare at her jerking elbow with some awareness in her eyes. She then started to cry and whine. The semiconscious state in the possessed is a vulnerable situation for the victim because the devil is able to cause physical pain and suffering to the victim in order to disrupt and possibly stop the session. The deeper the victim has given himself up to the evil one especially through the occult, the greater the retaliatory pain he can cause in the possessed. Sharp pains this time started buffeting different parts of the girl's body that with her tears, moans, and screams, she was truly a pitiable sight to witness. I quickly grabbed the exorcised oil to counter the retaliations on her body. I asked myself, "How long can we continue? How long can she take it?"

In her semiconscious state, the girl manifested a wide array of emotions; she would go from outbursts of anger and hatred to displays of pitiable whimpering and outward meekness. I could see that her bodily reactions were a combination of her own personal physical pains due to the demonic retaliations and the torments that were being afflicted on the evil spirits through the prayers of command and the other sacramentals. Her body had become the instrument of torture for both her and the spirits within.

Fr. Mateo, at this point in time, again recited the prayers of the Roman Ritual assisted by Fr. Jojo. The doctor and I were busy applying the exorcized oil on the areas of her body that bore the brunt of the devil's retaliatory attacks. A sudden sharp pain would be felt by her in her head which would then transfer to her back whenever the oil was applied; it would again transfer to her stomach area after the anointing, and so on and so forth. Most of the others were still trying their best in holding her down since her body was doing its best to slither away from the old priest commanding the spirits. Through her shrieks and moans, we could distinguish that she was calling out weird-sounding names. Were they the names of the spirits tormenting her or the names of reinforcing spirits? There was no time to discern that at the moment; we needed to keep up the

constant bombardment in order not to give any breathing space for the spirits.

Amidst the pandemonium, all of a sudden the victim's rigid arms shot outward and her hands violently grabbed her own hair trying viciously to pull them out. We grappled with her to loosen her grip.

This seemed alarming but in reality this can be a good sign. An indication that the demons are in their final throes of frustration and desperation would be when they would use the victim's body to harm itself. It was as though they were sending the message to those trying to liberate their victim, "If we can't have her, no one else will!"

After some moments of struggle, we were able to release her tight grip on her hair; I immediately marked her palms with the sacred oil to expel the preternatural force controlling them. "How long can we keep this up?" I wondered as it was almost midnight. I knew of well-known cases that lasted up to three weeks of constant exorcism prayers.

Then another sign of the self-destructive and self-loathing nature of evil spirits manifested itself. She grabbed her throat with both hands and started strangling herself; her face became a mask of pain as she struggled to breathe. Some of us immediately tried with difficulty to pry her hands from her throat. Her small wiry and slippery arms were difficult to hold on to but we finally succeeded in dislodging her fingers gripping her neck. The continuous struggle drained everyone physically, emotionally, and mentally yet each one continued with his assigned task with determination. In contrast, the young girl was still as strong as she was when we had begun. Where was she getting all her strength and endurance; a thin frail girl against the entire team? Of course, I knew. But through the mercy of God, the light at the end of the tunnel was in sight.

As Fr. Mateo reached again the third batch of prayers in the Roman Ritual that specifically targetted occult spirits, the entire upper body of the young and frail girl suddenly jerked upwards. Her dark and reddened face, brought about by her tremendous physical exertions, was frozen in a grimace which exhibited a mixture of varying emotions: revulsion, pain, disgust, and desperation. Her face turned upwards and her mouth opened to reveal her tongue which slithered outwards. She then started coughing and retching like someone who was vomiting due to having eaten something foul. "At last," I told myself, "she is expelling the spirits!" It is well known in exorcism literature that possessed persons usually expel spirits through the mouth and nose.

This went on for some time; then her upper body fell limp and looked lifeless. We waited intently. Little-by-little she regained her consciousness and soon awoke completely from her semi-trance possessed state. I motioned with my hand for Jing to give her a drink from the nearby bottle of purified water which had been blessed previously. She drank it thirstily

and without any negative reactions. "That's a good sign," I thought to myself.

We moved away from the victim. With the calm and peace restored, I knew that the Lord's will had again been accomplished. After a brief meeting with the members of the team to assess the case and plan other assignments for the victim, we returned to her in order to pray, with the rest of those present, the prayers of thanksgiving.

"Let's call it a day," I somberly told the others afterwards as we sleepily gathered our belongings and started returning the chairs. I took a look at the young girl who was at that time smiling and quite animated and talkative. What a stark contrast from the incoherent, confused, and in a zombie-like state she was when she first entered the room. As she passed me while on her way out, she beamingly smiled at me and thanked me with a sincerity that came from a truly peaceful and freed heart. We at AMOE learned a week later that not only was she healed but also all paranormal occurrences in the office had stopped. May God always be glorified!

PART II

SPIRITUALITY OF THE EXORCIST

It is characteristic of the divine goodness to protect with greater wisdom whatever the devil assaults with greater violence.

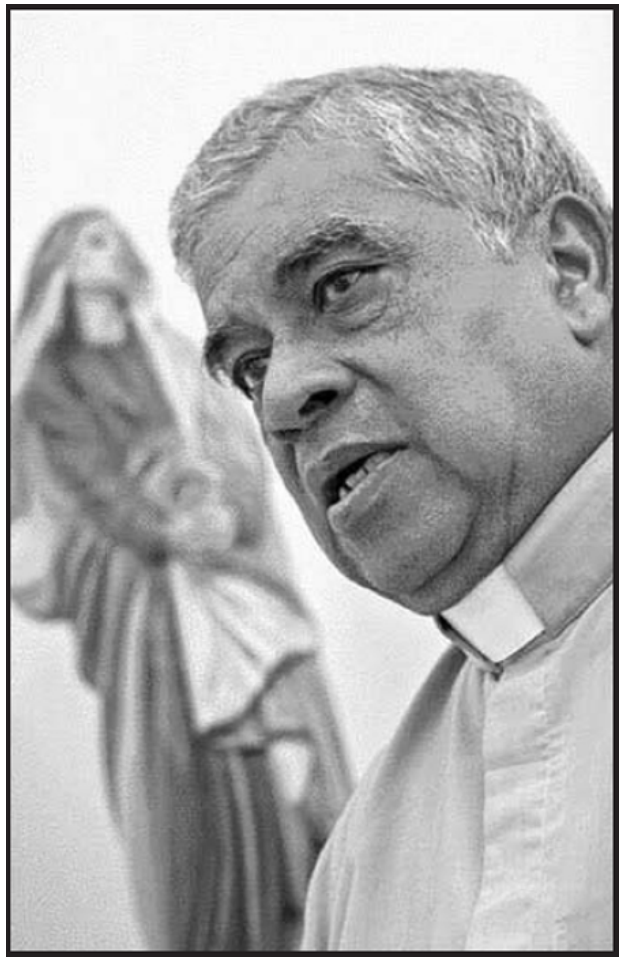
—St. Ignatius of Loyola

Great courage is required in spiritual warfare.

—St. Teresa of Avila

The devil can bark but he cannot bite, unless a person lets himself be bitten.

—St. Augustine



Fr. Rufus Pereira,
President of the International Association of Deliverance

CHAPTER I

General Requirements for Those in the Ministry of Spiritual Warfare

General Reminders for Individuals

1. Make sure that the Lord is calling you to this type of ministry. Discern! Seek advice from those in authority: your bishop, parish priest, elders of the community.

2. Part of the discernment process is checking one's motives. A pure motive means, one enters the ministry because of the desire to glorify God and love him through ministering to the victim. Beware of entering the ministry due to curiosity and sensationalism.

3. It must always be borne in mind that the ministry is secondary; holiness in one's life is priority. Focus therefore on growing in the life of prayer and virtue and all else that is needed in the ministry will follow. Do not focus so much on the charisms lest your interior life becomes neglected; you will be open to demonic retaliation!

4. Know yourself and "seal" any vulnerable areas in your life as best as you can, which can become targets for the devil. These may be physical illnesses, psychological problems, emotional immaturity, relational difficulties, and/or spiritual sin areas. Of course, the most dangerous "openings" are the spiritual ones. Continue to do your best in addressing these vulnerable areas while asking Mama Mary to cover with her mantle those areas you are still trying to develop, overcome, and heal. You will be protected!

5. Diagnose properly the cases brought to you vis-a-vis your capacities

and limitations; know when and where to refer if it is beyond or outside your competence. Never go against the advice and treatment of medical and psychiatric personnel if the victim is under their care. Always work in tandem with these experts by being transparent and seeking approval of what your plans are for the victim.

6. Never be a "lone ranger"; you will get hurt! Always work within the confines of a Church-recognized community under the direction of priests and the diocesan bishop. This ministry is no joke!

General Reminders for Groups

1. In my experience, communities doing deliverance ministry can easily be contaminated by the occult/esoteric (because sometimes these methods seem effective) which leads to contamination and destruction of the group. For example, when the group starts to use amulets for protection, dowsing to detect paranormal activity, séances to communicate with the spirits, energies for healing and deliverance, unintelligible Latin incantations (*orasyon*) to command spirits, unblessed incense sticks to cleanse haunted houses, "sacred" wood and other natural objects to torture the demons in the demoniac and the like. The occult/esoteric power sources are to be avoided like the plague; their effectiveness are only deceptions of the spirits and temporary (their seeming effectiveness is to draw those making use of them to rely on them more and more and later be in bondage to the demonic source of these occult powers). Always and only use the means approved by the Church to combat the devil.

2. Division is the foremost weapon used against communities in this ministry and if there is the onset of disunity among the members, this is a sign that the devil has already penetrated the group. The devil seeks the weakest links in the group and attacks the emotional stability of these people causing jealousy, envy, and hatred as well as uncharitable talk and gossiping. The community must therefore always be watchful for any early warning signs of division and where it is starting from. The community then immediately adopts the necessary steps to bring the matter to light and settle with love and understanding the growing discord. Prayer for unity is always important for any community; one mind and one heart is what the devil hates.

3. Groups in the ministry must learn first to place holiness of life as its priority; the development of the necessary charismatic gifts needed in the ministry must only come second. Hence programs for the

community must focus on developing the interior life of each one; prayer especially meditation, the capital virtues, an authentic sacramental life, devotion to Mama Mary and the saints, etc. As St. Paul tells us, the greatest of all God's gifts is love and without it all the charisms in the world would be useless for the soul of the person.

4. Deliverance groups must always be under the guidance of the Church through the respective diocesan bishop and his representatives. All these are to avoid abuses and dangers usually connected with this type of ministry. The charismatic dimension of the Church must always be guided by the institutional hierarchical dimension. This is a must!

5. If it has been determined that exorcism/deliverance/healing is needed and the group is a formally appointed office representing a diocesan bishop, make certain that the proper protocols are followed. For example, for a given case, permission is needed from the victim and his or her family and from the proper Church authorities who have pastoral governance over the person (diocesan bishop if from another diocese/parish priest if from the same diocese), and if any, the victim's doctor (especially when the person is gravely ill) and/or his psychiatrist (especially when the victim is suicidal).

CHAPTER II

Prayer

Prayer Lifestyle

An important element in the deliverance and exorcism ministry is to learn how to pray as the saints did, hence learning how they prayed is extremely important. Do we know our traditions of prayer taught by the Doctors of the Church such as St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. Alphonsus Liguori, St. Francis de Sales, etc.?

The fruits of an authentic Catholic life of prayer such as spiritual protection, faith, courage, trust, spiritual authority, and confidence are of immense importance in the ministry of exorcism and deliverance. An exorcist therefore reads, assimilates, and practices our Catholic prayer traditions. The following are some of the fruits of an authentic prayer life:

1. A minister with an authentic prayer life would be able to pray with deep faith for protection for himself, his team members, and his loved ones as he enters into spiritual combat with the devil. In my own experience, the greater the prayer of faith in God and Mama Mary's protection, the more one is freed from demonic harassments and retaliation. Faith is the key! Be clear on this; the devil can retaliate and will do so if he can since he is a roaring lion capable not only of attacking but also counterattacking. Also, if he can't get at you, he will retaliate against your loved ones and even your possessions, hence a prayer for protection should include all those close to us as well as our material belongings. We must never fear the devil, we must only be watchful. He is like a sneaky cowardly thief planning to rob a home, who, when he sees that the perimeter of the house is guarded, slinks away.

2. A living prayer life grants the minister the strength he needs to persevere in this challenging ministry. The ministry can be draining

since the devil attacks his victims at no predetermined time, hence we may be called to minister when we ourselves are busy or tired out with other concerns. I remember the times that people seeking for help would just arrive in the seminary when I least expected it. Also, dealing with evil day in and day out can drain the most hardy person, burning him out and making him cynical about life; a deep prayer life keeps the heart guarded and always filled with the beauty, love, and goodness of God.

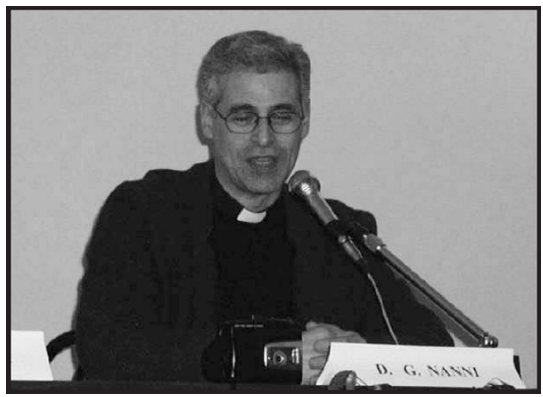
3. An authentic prayer life develops an intimate experience of God or "sense" of the presence of God. This "sense" of God in the soul is important since this is what destroys the emotional and psychological fear in any encounter with the devil. Entering into the deliverance and exorcism ministry is not simply a matter of attending classes and workshops since the foundation of the ministry is the exorcist's intimate relationship with God (his "sense" that God is truly present and with him) developed in prayer. If this is lacking in the everyday life of a person, it will not suddenly appear during an exorcism session even with the greatest willpower. Imagine an exorcist coming from a long and beautiful retreat where he has experienced an intense love of God; now imagine him confronting a demoniac; there would be no fear in the exorcist's heart because the "sense" of God's presence is overwhelming and empowering that any thoughts about the devil manifesting through the possessed has no effect on him.

4. A deep prayer life also ensures that the exorcist commands the evil spirits with authority and confidence. Experiencing God within him, the exorcist has no difficulty allowing the authority of God to issue from his lips with full power.

5. A minister with a deep prayer life is also able to teach the victim and his family how to pray authentically (from the heart) with true faith, sincerity, and confidence. An exorcist should not just take the word of the victim and his family that they are prayerful individuals because many times, their prayers can be mere lip service (there is no attention and devotion; there is no real faith and confidence but fear and anxiety) and legalistic (the relational dimension with God is lacking; the prayers do not come from the heart). It is vital to remember that the depth of the prayer life of the victim (as he or she is personally invited during the deliverance and healing session to pray with full faith and confidence for his or her liberation and healing) greatly facilitates in the expulsion of the demons as well as in the healing of the patient. It is vital to remember that the two

main characters in an exorcism are God and the victim! If the prayer life of those concerned is lacking, the exorcist must build it up by continually speaking about the love, mercy, and goodness of God so that the victim prays and calls to the Lord with full sincerity and confidence.

I remember one of my first cases of demonic oppression and obsession. He was an elementary student from a well-known Catholic school; he had to stop schooling when the attacks started and was already diagnosed by the psychiatrist as schizophrenic. He was about to be institutionalized but before he was brought to the hospital, the parents decided to bring him to me first. The family arrived unannounced in the seminary seeking for help because their son was already so terrified and agitated, and he really seemed on the brink of a nervous breakdown; he was seeing all kinds of demonic creatures around him and some would even be smiling evilly at him. After a short interview, I decided to pray over him, using some deliverance prayers but I also told him to pray from the heart to Jesus for deliverance. When I saw him close his eyes, clasp his hands together, and very solemnly and intently start to pray to Jesus, I was inspired. He was praying so sincerely to Christ that he was shaking and tears were flowing from his eyes; I told myself then, “That is real prayer.” No wonder, children are precious in the eyes of God and their prayers are always answered. I knew then and there from the depths of my heart that this child would be healed by Jesus, that Jesus was pleased with the prayer of this child. Sure enough, the following week, he was back at school. How important it truly is for parents to teach their children, as early as possible, who Jesus is and how to pray to him with love and sincerity.



Fr. Gabriele Nanni, an exorcist and a lecturer at the course on Exorcism at the Pontifical University, Regina Apostolorum, Italy

How do we develop an authentic prayer life?

1. Meditation according to our Church's tradition (not zen, yoga, and other forms of eastern exercises which merely develop psychic abilities and bring one to altered states of consciousness) is the very foundation of a life of prayer; all saints started here before they advanced to the higher stages of contemplative prayer. It has always been stated by the saints themselves that, and this is of vital importance to remember, one cannot attain the heights of prayer, much more sanctity, without learning how to properly meditate; hence all saints, and I mean all of them, used meditation as the starting point of their growth towards holiness of life.

2. All Catholics know how to pray vocal prayers, that is, prayers expressed in words which can either be private prayer (for example, novenas, devotional prayers, chaplets, and personal prayers of petition) or public prayer (community intercessions, Liturgy of the Hours, participating in the Mass, etc.) but very few know and practice meditation, hence even after years of vocal prayer, many are still more or less the same persons committing again and again the same sins, experiencing their same weaknesses as well as experiencing that their vocal prayers are becoming routinary, tiresome, filled with distractions, and even sometimes becoming totally meaningless for them.

3. When meditation becomes part and parcel of one's daily life, all types of vocal prayer become a joy; they also become meaningful, deep, intimate, and connected with one's day-to-day life. Meditation is not only the necessary foundation to grow in one's prayer and Christian life; it is also the heart of all vocal prayers whether public (like the Mass) or private (like prayers of devotion) because it develops the necessary interior dispositions that make a person truly participate body, soul, and spirit in all forms of vocal prayers. Therefore two persons can be attending the Mass yet one receives minimal graces while the other leaves the Church filled with joy and zeal, ready to perform his Christian duties in the world. The first person's prayer life is limited only to vocal prayers while the latter person meditates regularly. So it would be good to remember that it is meditation properly done that gives all vocal prayers their meaning, intensity, motivation, and intimacy. The Mass, through meditation, becomes alive and its fruits overflow to one's daily life; personal prayers during the day become more intimate and truly from the heart; prayer before meals become a real conversation with the Lord and so on and so forth.

4. But meditation is only the beginning (it is the second grade of

prayer in the nine grades of prayer according to St. Teresa of Avila) of an intimacy with God that will blossom into a union that is so complete (as much as possible while on this earth) that the soul is totally transformed in God (hence the last grade of prayer is called the prayer of transforming union). We must always remember the great adventures of the saints when they started praying: from the beginnings of the spiritual joy in their souls while still in ascetical prayer (the first four grades) to the heights of ecstasy and mystical transformation when they reached the point of mystical prayer (the last five grades). Sometimes, due to the extreme presence and love of God in their souls in the mystical grades of prayer, their limited bodies would exhibit supernatural manifestations. We, who are called to be people of prayer, are called to the heights of mystical prayer; it is only sad that few attain it because many lack the systematic know-how and perseverance to reach it. According to St. Teresa of Avila, there are nine grades in prayer, it would be good to check our prayer life with this standard and see how far we have gone and how we can better attain the higher grades. If we want to have a fruitful and authentic prayer time, let us learn from the real experts—the saints.

Developing a Prayer Lifestyle

A true disciple of Christ has, as his center, his prayer life; all else that he does whether family duties, career, recreation, etc. should revolve around this central hub and be influenced by it. Prayer is of vital importance to a Christian because without it, there is no relationship with God whatsoever! It is sad that some Catholics place their prayer life on the periphery of their lives, having as their center, their career, their business, their hobby, their pleasures, and what not. They enter only into prayer when it is an obligation, when they have a lot of surplus time to kill or when in dire need, hence prayer is the first to go when this person is busy with what he feels are more important priorities in his life.

As was stated, without prayer, there is no relationship with God and without this, the full blessings of God, his protection and guidance do not reach the person. This person therefore easily falls into all kinds of material, physical, psychological, and emotional difficulties; he is also prone to fall easily when confronted with the slightest temptations from the devil.

It would be good to remind ourselves that when we are finally called by Jesus to judgment, the only standard to enter heaven that he would look for would be our love relationship with God developed through our

prayer life. No more, no less; not our worldly achievements, talents, beauty, possessions, position in society (even if one were the president of the country once), financial accounts, number of fans and admirers, IQ; no! His only standard will be our love relationship with him developed in prayer and expressed in loving and serving our neighbor.

What follows now are guidelines on how to meditate (which is the beginning of a lifestyle of prayer) according to our Catholic tradition. Let us now learn how to pray as the saints prayed or to pray as Mama Mary prayed. The lessons here are invaluable since they produced the great saints of the Church. The method presented is not the only method of meditation; there are other Catholic traditions of meditating such as the method of St. Ignatius which makes more use of the imagination, the method of St. Sulpice, etc. The method that is being presented here is more of the Carmelite manner of meditation (with some minor variations). What must be remembered is that all methods of meditation in our tradition are in essence all the same; there is always the preparatory prayer, the body of the meditation where reflection and affections (acts of love for God) occur, resolution or application to one's life, and the final prayer asking for the grace to live out the resolutions.

It would therefore be good to find out later what tradition of meditation is most helpful to you. But before that, I recommend the method below; give time to meet God in this method for at least *30 minutes* (in front of the Blessed Sacrament if possible) *every day* for *a month*. I can guarantee the reader that he will not only see major changes in his manner of thinking, feeling, and acting (growing more in holiness of life), find more intimacy in vocal prayer (private and public prayer), but also begin to love meditation!

Meditation/Mental Prayer

Meditation is a reasoned application of the mind and heart (reading and then reflecting) to some supernatural truth (anointed word/sentence) in order to penetrate its meaning for us, love its value, and carry it into practice in one's daily life (resolution) with the assistance of grace; all this is done within the context of a dialogue with God.

We see some who recite the rosary, the office of the Blessed Virgin, and give themselves to other exterior practices of piety, and nevertheless continue to live in sin; but when any one constantly practices mental prayer it is impossible for him to live in sin.

—St. Alphonsus Ligouri

It (meditation) is especially indispensable for those who are tending to

perfection, all the saints have arrived there by this way; it is the shortest road to it.

—St. Ignatius of Loyola

The principal fruit of mental prayer consists in making a good resolution, and a strong one, too, in grounding one's resolutions on a firm basis, in being thoroughly convinced of their necessity, in being ready to put them into practice, and in foreseeing obstacles in order to overcome them.

—St. Vincent de Paul

Meditation, sometimes called mental prayer is a prayer that involves all the faculties of the person, hence its effectiveness in bringing about the conversion of a person from a sinful or mediocre state of life to the heights of holiness.

The first step is finding a meditation book that is in accordance with one's spiritual level of development. For example, a seminarian who is in the beginning stages of formation will not benefit much if he meditates on books that speak about the heights of contemplative prayer. It would be more helpful for him to concentrate on meditation books that deal with destroying vices and building up the appropriate virtues in one's life. Another example is a seminarian who focuses on Protestant books that merely inspire (For example, *The Purpose Driven Life*); he would not develop adequately his spiritual life. These inspirational types of books may be helpful for those who are in the world and still need that extra push to begin a real relationship with God. But for a seminarian in theology, training to be a future shepherd of souls, what he needs most are the writings of the saints or about the saints which not merely inspire but radically challenge him towards the heights of holiness. Those who are more advanced in the spiritual life should not be fed "milk" anymore but "solid meat."

If one is truly called to the ministry of healing and deliverance, it is assumed that one's spiritual life is more mature than that of the ordinary lay person, hence his meditation books should also mirror that fact.

Recommended reading for those in the ministry or preparing for it should center on the lives and writings of the saints: for example, St. Faustina Kowalska (Divine Mercy), St. Thérèse of Lisieux (Story of a Soul), St. Teresa of Avila (The Way of Perfection, The Interior Castle, Autobiography), St. Alphonsus Liguori (Preparation for Death, The Passion and the Death of Jesus Christ, The Way of Salvation, The Glories of Mary), St. Francis de Sales (Introduction to the Devout Life), St. Ignatius of Loyola (The Spiritual Exercises), St. John of the Cross (Ascent to Mt. Carmel), Dom Lorenzo Scupoli (The Spiritual Combat), Thomas A. Kempis (Imitation of Christ), and many more.

What is important is that the meditation book chosen should grant the

reader a fair amount of inspirations (touches of God on the mind) and consolations (touches of God on the heart); the word or words that inspire and arouse the reader are what we term, “anointed word(s).” When a meditation book chosen lacks word(s) that touch the mind and heart (anointed word/sentence), it may mean that the book is not suitable reading at the moment for the person. Meditation time then deteriorates to merely reading time. Consulting with a spiritual director (if one has one) is highly advised with regard to choosing a suitable meditation book.

Another necessary requirement is to have a personal journal which will be used during the meditation proper; this is of utmost importance so that the inspirations and consolations from God may be written down and remembered during moments of trial and desolation; also if they are written down, they can more easily be brought up during spiritual direction (if the person has a spiritual director). The journal may also be used as a guide during a future retreat. When reviewed in prayer, it also becomes a means by which a person will be able to discover how God has been journeying with him in the past (which would give him faith and confidence for the future). One final importance of the journal is that as it is brought to prayer (maybe during a retreat), it becomes an aid for the person in discerning where God may be leading him.

Doing Meditation/Mental Prayer

1. One should seek a place of quiet and set at least 30 minutes for meditating.

2. Preparation—one calls upon the Holy Spirit so that he becomes open to the inspirations (graces which touch the mind) and consolations (graces which touch the heart) from God. He prays that he become sensitive to the movements and actions of the Holy Spirit in his soul.

3. Then one starts reading slowly from the chosen meditation book; quality not quantity is the norm when reading meditatively.

4. When a word or sentence (anointed word/sentence) touches his heart (consolation) or mind (inspiration), the person stops reading and places the book down.

5. If it is an inspiration, he reflects on why it has made an impact on him; he further reflects on what the Lord is trying to tell him. Is the Lord making him realize something? Is he being challenged to focus on something in his life? The important things to ask are:

a. What does this word or sentence mean?
b. And then, what does this word or sentence mean for me?
c. Lastly, how am I called by God to respond (resolution)?
d. Write down the inspiration and resolution on your journal.

6. Now, if the person were merely focused on answering these questions with his mind, this activity would not be prayer. So now we come to the most important point in the discussion. Prayer is dialoguing with God; he speaks to us through his inspirations and consolations and we should now respond by speaking to him. Without this dialogue, meditation/mental prayer would not be real prayer but merely some form of mental gymnastics.

7. So, as we are reflecting and answering the above three questions, we should do so by speaking to the Lord about them. Speaking to him about them is what makes meditation a prayer; it is here that we dialogue with God; we raise our minds and voices to God and connect with him.

8. For example, if a person reads and is touched by the generosity of a certain saint, he does the following:

   a. Talks to God about it: “Lord, why is generosity pleasing in your eyes?” “What motivated that saint to be generous?”
   b. Speaks to God about this virtue with regard to himself: “Looking at my life, Lord, I have been a bit stingy with regard to those who come to me in need,” “Looking at my values, dear Jesus, it seems I have never given importance to being generous.”
   c. Talks to the Lord regarding the challenge for him: “Lord, I am sorry that I have never seen you among the needy,” “Lord, grant me the grace to see the value of generosity and the evilness of selfishness,” “Lord, I praise you for allowing me to see this spiritual block in my life,” “Lord, help me to be more generous to those around me who are in need especially those I meet on my way to work.”
   d. Write down on your journal the basic inspiration from God, the lessons learned, and the general resolution made.

9. Now what if the anointed word or sentence touched your heart (consolation) more than your mind (inspiration)? The procedure to follow is almost the same as when one is touched mainly by an inspiration.

10. The main difference is that when it is a question of a consolation

(God touching the heart), the person puts down the book but does not immediately reflect on the anointed word or sentence.

11. The person gives time to savor the consolation; it is just like when one tastes a very delicious food; the person usually closes his eyes to savor the taste more; he chews ever so slowly so that he may more relish the flavor with each bite. It is when there is no more taste to be savored that the person swallows the morsel of food.

12. When God touches the heart, we stop and savor as much as we can the consolation that his loving touch causes. We allow this consolation to fill and saturate our heart with his presence; if the consolation is so intense that we feel like shedding tears, we do so; if the consolation makes us want to praise the Lord in words, we do so (although if there are others present, we do it as quietly as we can); if the consolation touches our hearts with repentance, we humbly ask forgiveness; if the consolation makes us want to kneel in adoration, we do so; if the loving touch of God brings us to intense gratefulness, we thank the Lord from the bottom of our hearts, and so on and so forth.

13. When we respond to the consolation of God through words and actions, we can say that we have already entered into prayer since a lifting up of our minds and hearts to God has already occurred.

14. It must be remembered that our actions and words (praise, adoration, thanksgiving, asking forgiveness, etc.) should never be forced but must come about naturally through the consolation that the Lord gives us due to the anointed word or sentence.

15. After we have, in a sense, fully savored the consolation and not before, we go to the next steps. Remember as with responding to inspirations, we dialogue with God during these steps:

    a. We speak to the Lord on what transpired.
    b. We ask the Lord what he desires to tell us through the consolation. (We listen to our heart for the answer.)
    c. We dialogue with God regarding how he would now want us to respond to his great gift of the consolation; “What is he now asking of me?” “What is he challenging me to do?”
    d. Write down on your journal the consolation from God, the lessons learned, and the resolution made.

16. We then end the meditation with a concluding prayer that includes

thanksgiving to God for speaking to us (in our mind and heart) and a prayer of supplication asking in humility for the graces needed to live out the resolution.

Supplementary Points

1. Meditation affects all the faculties of a person, hence its effectiveness in producing saints.

    a. The intellect—meditation through reflection and inspirations make a person arrive at firm convictions about divine realities; it builds up the desire for the good. (We learn more about God and this is important because we cannot love what we do not know.)
    b. The emotions—meditation through the consolations due to the anointed word or sentence as well as by dialoguing with the Lord brings healing, affirmation, and intimacy to the emotional dimension of the person. (Love of God grows as the emotions are drawn more and more towards God.)
    c. The will—meditation through the resolutions made and lived out disciplines the will towards God and his will. (This is what makes the person grow in holiness since vices are destroyed and the virtues, especially the virtue of love, are developed and become centered on God.)

2. So we see here why vocal prayer alone cannot produce holiness; it must go hand in hand with meditation which develops the interior dispositions necessary to give oneself fully (body and soul) to vocal prayer (whether private or public); if applied to marriage, vocal prayers are the external manifestations of love while meditation deepens the love in the hearts and minds of both parties.

3. It is recommended that the resolutions made are written down in a separate sheet and placed in a conspicuous place so that the person may continually be reminded of applying them during the day. This is the only way good habits or virtues are formed. We must also strive to preserve during the day, the pious thoughts and the holy affections we experienced in our prayer, hence reading one's journal during certain moments of the day is also recommended.

4. Practicing the resolutions made during prayer is what destroys the vices in the person and replaces them with the corresponding virtues; without this, the vices (sin areas) become blocks to go deeper into prayer (intimacy with God) since grace has difficulty entering a soul filled with evil, sin, and other impurities. Prayer can only deepen or

progress when the sin areas that block grace are eradicated as seen in the lives of the saints.

5. From the above point, we can therefore say that the greatest difficulties in prayer and the greatest obstacles to its progress have their roots outside of prayer—in one's day-to-day life. If a person is continually in the state of mortal sin, the quality of one's prayer will not only become shallow, it may even be totally destroyed. Everything therefore that can make or mar our friendship with God outside of formal prayer will make or mar our prayer life.

6. So, prayer will not develop unless the soul is advancing towards purity of conscience (no deliberate consent to sin), heart (all affections are centered and subordinated on God and his will), mind (recollection) and action (motives; all actions are done according to God's will, for his glory and for love of him; purity of intention).

7. How to handle difficulties in prayer:

    a. Be yourself in prayer.
    b. Prevent external distractions by selecting the proper time and place and a reasonably comfortable posture; at the very least, withdraw mentally from the surroundings and enter the cell of the heart to speak with God.
    c. Rid oneself of internal sources of distractions by putting aside all thoughts of one's duties, anxieties, interests, except so far as they are the subject matter of one's prayer.
    d. If we have prepared properly to enter into prayer and distractions still come, it is important to remember that every distraction increases merit if we persevere in praying; this also hastens our progress in the spiritual life; how many acts of humility, patience, and resignation they make us practice.
    e. When distraction arrives and one becomes aware of it, simply and with peace return to the focus of one's meditation; this must be done in peace and calm so that the recollection and tranquility of the mind and emotions in God are not disturbed.
    f. Dryness in prayer is the inability to produce the necessary intellectual (difficulty in being touched by any anointed word or sentence) and affective (emotions are dry and the will has difficulty arriving at resolutions) acts during prayer or it may even be an actual distaste for prayer; check the causes, they may be voluntary such as lukewarmness in the service of God, infidelity to grace, habitual venial sin, habits of sensuality, vain curiosity, and excessive activism.

g. Remember that the end of prayer is not enjoyment but perfection. If one is not becoming holier after months of meditating, something is wrong in the way prayer is done or its application to daily life.

Giving a parish talk in Pasig

CHAPTER III

Purity of Motives

Proper Motivation

Persons with impure motives should not be allowed to enter the ministry of healing and deliverance. First of all, it would be dangerous for them; they would be vulnerable to demonic harassments and retaliations because their hearts are not yet purified and protected by the grace of God.

Another danger for them would be that because their spiritual life has not yet developed sufficiently to minister in love, they would be prone to fall into all kinds of temptations: pride, anger, impatience, self-righteousness, envy, jealousy, competition, etc.

Another consequence if persons with impure motives are accepted into the ministry is that the victims would tend to be treated as objects: sideshow freaks, personal experiments, trophies to bolster one's ego, etc. I know, since I have met these kinds of ministers and seen how they treated the victims of possession and oppression under their "care." They do not listen to Church authority regarding the matter but they stick to their own narrow-minded ideas which maybe they learned by watching movies on exorcism. They use the victim as a guinea pig (a pet project), experimenting different ways to torture the devil in the person and watching with morbid curiosity the different effects without even realizing that the person can also experience many times the pain and torture. They cannot distinguish when the demon is manifesting and when the person's consciousness has already returned, hence they treat both the demon and the victim in the same harsh manner—shouting hateful words and physically abusing them. They do not seek outside help because they claim that the victim has been given to them by God to heal. They will only seek Church assistance when they get bored of the usual displays of the demoniac or when the case gets too burdensome for them. How sad because by this time, the victim may

have become a nervous wreck and maybe has already lost faith in God and his Love.

The only two proper motives that should be in the heart of an exorcist are love for God and love for neighbor. It would be good to examine ourselves regarding these motives if we feel called to the healing and deliverance ministry, much more the exorcism ministry. To those who feel called or are already in these ministries, Ask yourselves, “Is my basic motive for entering (or being) in these ministries primarily my love for God which I am called to express through loving and caring for my neighbor who is sick or demonically in bondage?”

It is important to remember that an exorcism is only pleasing in the eyes of God and meritorious for the exorcist if love is behind all that he does; this is the most important element that God looks for in the heart of his minister and this is what gives God the greatest glory and pleasure. It would be good therefore, before ministering to the victim, that the exorcist in prayer purifies his intentions with these two dispositions: love of God manifesting itself in love of neighbor. May we never hear the response of Christ after telling him, “Have we not expelled spirits in your Name?” He answers, “Away from me, I do not know you!”

1. Love of God—God should always be the center of the ministry, never the devil; the struggle against the devil should only serve as a means to show our love for God. The minister is therefore only focused on the ever-deepening relationship that he has with God. This is the lifetime adventure that is worth all one’s mind and heart; there is so much joy and wonder to experience and realize during one’s journey towards God, so we should not waste any moment with the devil unless by defeating him, we would glorify and please God more. This disposition we see in the lives of the saints.

2. Love of neighbor—this love is founded on and is an expression of the love of God. An exorcism or deliverance session should always be seen as a spiritual and corporal act of mercy; the victim is seen as a brother/sister who is most especially in need of compassion. Secondly, we always see Jesus suffering in the person of the demonically afflicted so that we would see the person in need as an opportunity to show our gratitude and love for Jesus who suffered and died for us.

CHAPTER IV

Focusing on the Lord

Proper Attitude

There are three important attitudes that must be developed in the person of the exorcist: self-forgetfulness, complete trust in God, and a living faith.

1. Self-forgetfulness

    a. Egotism which can easily lead to pride is a very real danger for an exorcist. Jesus must increase and the exorcist must always decrease; God should be the only one glorified, never the exorcist because Jesus is the one and only true Exorcist. Hence, any self-glorification should be avoided like the plague; “flattery” from others must not be taken seriously, any mention from the exorcist of “my power” is already a sign of egotism. We must remember that our only motivation should only be that God may be pleased and glorified; that is the entirety of our motivation.
    b. Egotism and pride in the exorcist are dangerous for him because they will become major obstacles to his ministry. First, grace would be blocked, for the Lord resists the proud. Secondly, on the part of the exorcist, this leads him to reject the more difficult or seemingly impossible cases because of the fear of failure. If he fails in expelling the demons from the demoniac, it won’t look good on him and this would be a major blow to his ego. In addition, he would, without any qualms, tend to blame the victim for the failure, for example, “You lacked faith!” “You did not have enough confidence in God!” etc.
    c. Another great danger of egotism in the exorcist is when, because of his words and actions, the victim starts to believe and focus solely on the exorcist and not on God; the exorcist then becomes a major block to the healing and liberation which can only come

from God. The exorcist never ever heals or liberates, only God does. The principal task then of the exorcist is to lead the victim to rely totally on the true Healer and Deliverer who is God; if this is facilitated and the victim is able to call with full confidence and trust on Jesus, then all will end well quickly enough.

How does one develop self-forgetfulness?

a. Self-forgetfulness means one's consciousness is always on the Lord. When the exorcist prays to God for guidance and strength during the struggle, he should fully concentrate to whom he is speaking, who it is that is asking, and what he is asking for; this allows living faith to be present; this will also allow the prayer from becoming mere lip service or, even worse, degenerate into a magical incantation. When the exorcist learns to keep his eyes always on the Lord, no fear will enter his heart. This self-forgetfulness allows the exorcist to be free from all self-conscious fear. Another point is that if an exorcist has learned to forget himself truly, when he starts to command the devil to depart, he will feel a strong "sense" of Jesus commanding through his lips which gives his words authority and power.
b. The foundation of self-forgetfulness is humility; here an exorcist therefore bewares of any form of presumption; before ministering, he prepares well beforehand through humble prayers and fasting. Afterwards, he praises and thanks God, knowing that any success is due only to God's grace.
c. Another important point to remember here is to only and always do one's best and allow God to work as he wills. If the will of God is that the liberation comes later, the exorcist should remain at peace. In exorcism, God calls his ministers first and foremost to faithfulness and not success; we focus on merely doing the best of what is required of us and allow God's will to enfold according to his time frame. We must always be careful in this regard since having an undue emphasis on success could easily point to a minister focusing more on his efforts than on God's grace as well as having the start of the most dangerous vice—pride. (Question: Did I do my best? Did I do my part?—If yes, then I can be at peace whatever the outcome.)
d. Lastly, if our main motive in the ministry is to love and please God, not our self-centered egos, then whatever the outcome, whether the Lord decides to heal or deliver the person immediately or not, we will be content and at peace because by ministering to the patient we have already shown our love for God and have pleased him; that is all that matters.

Reading the book, *Life of Antony* by St. Athanasius, one learns this important lesson in humility and self-forgetfulness. St. Antony was the greatest of the early Christian exorcists.

> Through Antony the Lord freed many of them from their sufferings, but the healing of those he cured never made him arrogant nor did he become depressed and grumble at the fact that some bodies were still possessed by the demons. Instead, he gave thanks to God, maintaining always the same attitude and the same look, and persuading those who were possessed to bear with greater patience the attacks tormenting them. "For this medicine," he said, "does not belong to me or to any other human being but to God alone who grants healing to those he chooses and at the time he chooses." And so by means of his advice he taught those who were tormented to bear their trials with equanimity and those who were already freed to give thanks not to Antony but to God alone.

2. Trust in God

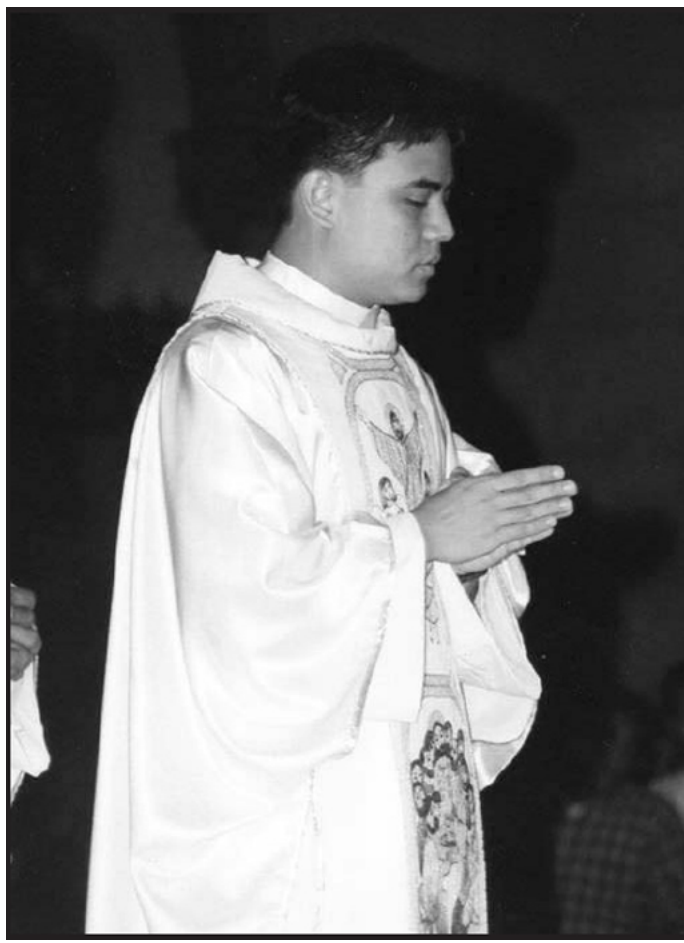
   a. An unshakeable trust in God's providence and protection is essential for an exorcist; this drives out all fear; this trust is centered on the fact that God will never allow the devil to go beyond certain boundaries or parameters, that the devil is truly under the power and authority of God. This is a truth that must be prayed about, pondered, and internalized by the exorcist if he is to enter the spiritual combat without fear.

      The exorcist therefore believes firmly in his heart that God is always present in all exorcisms and he is the one in control; the ranting and the ravings of the possessed merely manifest the frustrations of the devil because he is bound and surrounded by God's omnipresent power. Here, the devil can be likened to an infant crying in the crib because it desires to get out but cannot.

      Included here is the firm confidence that Mama Mary is always covering the exorcist with her mantle of protection because of her maternal love for him; she is our Mother and she will never allow her children to be hurt by any kind of enemy! This I know for a fact, with the hundreds of cases that our office has handled and some of these cases were persons deeply entrenched in Satanism. Our trust in God and in his protection is also due to the fact that he has sent angels to minister to us. They are sent by God to guide and protect us and we can be absolutely sure that they will perform their duties perfectly! Let us keep in mind that they are not only more powerful than the fallen angels because they have

grace in them but that they also minister to us with the power of God. Also, they are double the number of the fallen angels as attested to in the Bible. Hence, having these legions of angels battling alongside of us should dispel all fear and bolster our trust that God as our Father is surely looking after us.

b. Remember that this trust in God's authority pleases God as our Father and forms the foundation of a life protected from the evil one. The greater the trust in God, the more we will experience his protection. God is so good and merciful that he has given us his only Son, what else will he not give us?



Ordination

3. Faith

a. Faith in the Name of Jesus is of paramount importance; the exorcist firmly believes that this Name causes the entire hell to

tremble and flee. The apostles themselves drove away legions of fallen angels with one utterance of this Name. We must remember that the devil is terrified (yes, terrified!) of God's justice and authority and an exorcist commands the evil spirits with a confidence rooted in this reality. An exorcist therefore always prays that his faith be rooted in the truth about the Name of Jesus!

b. The exorcist leads the victim and his family to a relationship of faith (that can move mountains) in God, hence evangelization is very important in the beginning even before the exorcism session(s). It must be remembered that the faith of the community surrounding and praying for the victim is vital in his liberation and healing. The exorcist therefore also makes sure that the persons present during a deliverance/exorcism session are people who are devoted Catholics who can truly pray with a living faith. No atheists, agnostics, and curious bystanders should be allowed in the session!

c. We must also remember that the effectiveness of the sacramentals depend a lot on the faith of those using them. Using holy water, for example, should be done not with fear and anxiety but with a calm and confident faith in the awesome power of God working through the sacramental. It is important to remember that it is faith that produces miracles.

d. The exorcist can bolster his faith and those around him by including in the initial prayers before the session the promises of Jesus in the Gospel because what Jesus promises will always come true! The exorcist first adds in the initial prayers before the session the promise of Jesus that where two or three are gathered in his Name, he is in their midst. The exorcist claims this promise. Secondly, he mentions the promise of Jesus that whatever we ask in his Name will be given by our Father (this is always true with regard to spiritual gifts and graces); this also he claims with full faith and trust. Last, he claims that Jesus would hear their prayers for the victim because of the certainty of his infinite love, care, and compassion for the suffering. I pray these prayers myself in order to strengthen my own faith and those around me: my team, the companions of the victim, and the victim himself.

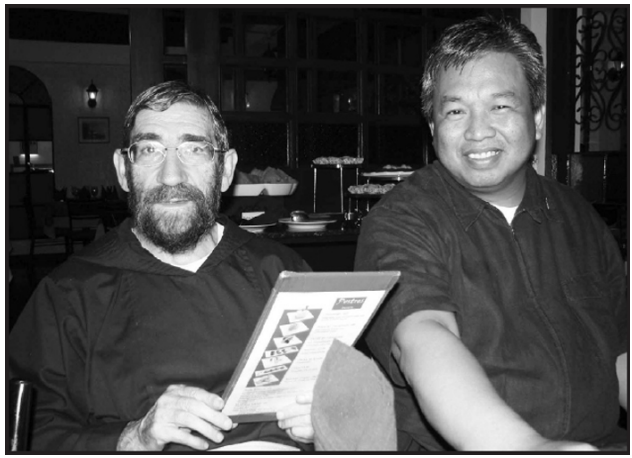
APPENDIX A

The Archdiocese of Manila Office of Exorcism Procedures

When potential cases arrive at the office, an initial interview is first conducted to evaluate the probability of extraordinary demonic influence. Usually, the client is asked to e-mail an account of the difficulties. If there is a real probability of extraordinary demonic activity and not merely a physical or psychological malady, a schedule is set for a more formal interview with a priest. The client then becomes a case.

During the more intensive interview, counseling and evangelization are usually included. Extraordinary demonic attacks usually point to a certain weakness in the person's faith life that left him unprotected. When dealing with cases outside of the Archdiocese of Manila, a referral letter from the respective diocesan bishops is required. If the victim resides within the Archdiocese of Manila, the letter of referral is given by the parish priest. Sometimes, part of the procedure is to ask for a psychological diagnosis of the victim from a psychiatrist. This will aid the office get a better picture of the difficulty and how to properly respond; it must also be remembered that demonic bondage may exist side by side with psychological illness. The devil aggravates the psychological vulnerabilities of the victim. Assignments are given to the victim and his family members to prepare them spiritually for the sessions that will follow. The assignments will vary according to the uniqueness and need of each case. These are very important and should be done conscientiously especially by the victim because without them, demonic retaliation upon the victim and those close to him may occur due to the still vulnerable areas not protected by grace. Another point is that without the spiritual preparation the deliverance and healing will only be temporary and may even get worse as there will be an abuse of grace; we see this in the Gospel when Jesus mentions the return of the expelled evil spirit with seven new others because the former demoniac

did not fill with God's presence the vacuum left by the demon.



Fr. Mateo, the Chief Exorcist of Manila and Fr. Bobby, a delegated deliverance minister of Manila

After all the above requirements have been fulfilled, then and only then is a schedule set for the exorcism/deliverance session. If the victim has any physical sickness which could be aggravated by the session, a doctor is on hand to assist. If the victim is not only demonically being harassed but also seriously psychologically ill, the consent of the victim's psychiatrist is sought.

Feedback evaluations are made a week after the exorcism.

Depending upon the results, the following may occur: follow-up exorcism/deliverance sessions, additional spiritual counseling, human counseling and/or inner healing sessions with a credited charismatic community. Inner healing is done to heal any traumas that became the open doorways that let the evil spirits into the life of the victim.

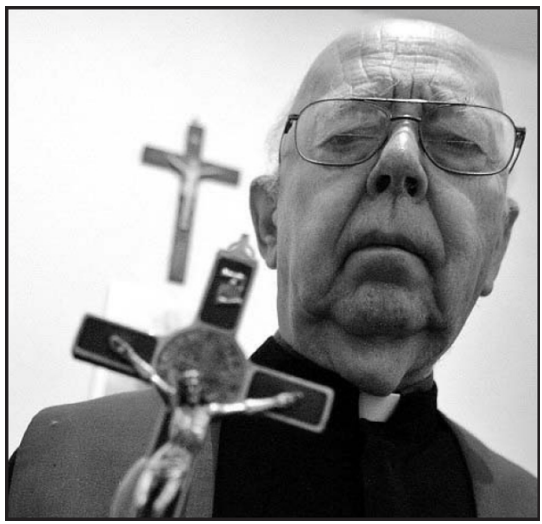
If the result of the evaluation is positive, meaning a nonrecurrence of the extraordinary demonic activity, then a follow-up call is done a month after to check the permanency of the liberation and healing. If still positive, another check is done after three more months and if there is a real permanency of healing and liberation, the case is resolved and is closed.

Some important considerations:

1. When in need of assistance due to probable demonic attack, seek help first and foremost from your respective bishop who may deal with your case directly (all bishops are exorcists) or he may assign a priest to handle your case; if there is difficulty seeking aid from the bishop, approach your parish priest and explain the situation to him.

He would then assist you on what to do next.

2. For those needing immediate healing and deliverance especially if the case is merely one of obsession, oppression, or infestation, we recommend that a priest (usually charismatic) knowledgeable in healing/deliverance be sought or if there is difficulty finding one, a Catholic charismatic community with a healing/deliverance ministry will be of great help. Seeking assistance from AMOE may take some time due to the number of cases and the number of requirements necessary (since we are a formal office representing the Archbishop of Manila and not simply a ministerial community).



Fr. Gabriele Amorth, Chief Exorcist of the Vatican

APPENDIX B

Interview with Rome's Chief Exorcist, Fr. Gabriele Amorth

The Exorcist[7]
Messenger of St. Anthony
by Renzo Allegri

Father Gabriele Amorth is the leader of Rome's six exorcists. He is also the most famous Catholic exorcist in the world. People come to see him from all round the world to ask for help in defeating satanic oppression, in other words, to combat the Devil in all his various activities against mankind.

He is 85 years old and belongs to the *Society of St. Paul*, the religious Congregation founded by Fr. James Alberione in 1914, known for his intense activity in mass communication. Fr. Gabriele, too, for many years, was involved in mass media, and edited the magazine, *Mother of God.* In addition to a theology degree, Fr. Gabriele also graduated in law. Having written many books and essays about the Virgin Mary, he has acquired the title of expert in Mariology and has been nominated member of the *Pontifical International Marian Academy*. But since having been entrusted with the role of exorcist in the diocese of Rome, his time has been completely consumed by his new ministry. These days he is considered the world's leading expert on problems concerning Satan and his evil activity against mankind. He is the "doctor" *par excellence* for illnesses caused by evil, the "surgeon" who knows how to root them out, fight, and prevent them.

"I would never have thought I'd be asked by the Church to carry out such a difficult mission," he recently declared when I met him for this interview. "Cardinal Ugo Poletti sent me the mandate when he was vicar of the diocese of Rome and President of the *Italian Episcopal Conference* (*CEI*). Luckily, at the beginning, I was the helper of one of the greatest exorcists that ever existed, Fr. Candido Amantini, a holy man whose

cause for beatification is about to be opened. He was an exorcist in Rome for 36 years and was an incredible teacher."

It is difficult to arrange a meeting with Fr. Amorth especially as he never has a free moment. For this interview he managed to spare a few hours one Thursday morning, but even during our conversation, he received telephone calls from people all over the world who were in need of him. "It is incredible," he says, "to see how many people look for an exorcist, and unfortunately there are few priests who are able to help them. For several centuries, the Church has overlooked the ministry of exorcism."

He speaks with determination. His unwavering faith is based on the Scripture and on the teachings of the Church. He reveals a deep knowledge of the subjects he discusses, extensive experience sustained by numerous case histories. "I think I must have carried out over 70,000 exorcisms in my lifetime. The problems I am called to deal with every day concern people who are suffering physically, psychologically, and spiritually. These problems are caused by the Devil. At times they are so serious they lead a person to suicide or death. Faced with many priests who reveal themselves to be skeptical, indifferent, or who consider these problems to be the fruit of imagination or obsession, I get very angry."

But are there really priests who are skeptical about this topic?
"Many if not lots! Contemporary religious culture, while not negating the existence of Satan and the other rebellious angels, is inclined to diminish their influence over people. Discrediting this influence is almost compulsory and is considered a sign of wisdom. This mentality, which is completely wrong, is commonplace not only among lay people, but also among priests, theologians, and even bishops, the practical consequences of which are far-reaching."

On what basis do you judge this mentality to be "completely wrong"?
"On the basis of the Sacred Scripture, the Apostolic Fathers, the Councils, and the tradition of the Church. Since the very beginning, the Church has taught that evil, pain, sin, death, and hell are not works of God. They are works of Satan. God created everything to be "good." Satan was the most perfect of all angels, but he rebelled against God and became his enemy. Satan corrupted Adam, introducing him to sin and the world of evil, death, pain, and illness. God, to repair the break caused by Adam's sin, sent his only Son Jesus to earth to redeem mankind through his passion, death, and resurrection. But the battle continues. Mortal beings, during their experience on earth, are blessed with freedom. They can choose between good and evil, between God and Satan. Jesus, while he was on earth, indicated the path towards salvation, and he set up the basis of an organization, his Church, which

is the sure guide towards the eternal Kingdom, and defense against Satan's attacks. The experience of every person, in his/her spatial-temporal dimension, is a test, a battle, a challenge in order to reach eternal life. Jesus works through his Church, Satan through his empire of evil. Ignoring these simple truths means not having a true awareness. Unfortunately, Christians no longer believe in these things these days. There is a harmful tendency to remove Satan and the other spirits of evil. But in this way, their power is only increased. This is perhaps why, in this day and age, Satan is so powerful and his influence over mankind is so great."

Some theologians, when they quote the Gospel and Scripture concerning Satan, declare that these are themes which need to be interpreted.
"See! Even you have discovered how many theologians claim to 'interpret' Sacred Scripture about this stinging issue. The reality is too serious, harsh, and terrible to be accepted to the letter and so for this reason they turn to 'interpretations,' interpretations which are wrong and which go against the Gospel. The existence of the Devil and his wicked influence on people is an indisputable fact of the Church. St. John clearly wrote in his Gospel that Christ descended from heaven and became man to destroy the work of the Devil. Jesus' entire life was devoted to this aim. There are numerous concrete examples. The Fathers of the Church have always taught this truth without hesitation. Only in the last few centuries has this doctrine lost its strength: not because of the Church's teaching, but because of some theologians. Officially, the Church has always affirmed the existence of Satan and his negative influence, but in practice, the clergy have been influenced by theories which question the existence of Satan. Some time ago, a researcher carried out an inquiry among Catholic priests, and the results showed that two-thirds accepted, in theory, the traditional doctrine about the Devil, but that they rejected the practical consequences. And yet on 29 June 1972, Pope Paul VI explicitly addressed the topic of Satan during Mass at St. Peter's. He called him 'the enemy of mankind' 'preternatural being' and accused him of wanting to destroy the fruits of the Council. The reactions of the lay world and of modernist theologians were violent, but they didn't intimidate the Pope who on 15 November of the same year returned to the topic clarifying that 'Satan is enemy number one, he is the tempter *par excellence*. We know that this dark and disturbing being exists for real and acts… he is the sophistic tempter of mankind's moral equilibrium…' At the end of his long speech, the Pope categorically stated: 'Whoever refuses to recognize the reality of the Devil rejects biblical and ecclesiastical teaching.' There are no doubts of any kind: denying the existence of the Devil destroys Christ's

redemption. Whoever does not believe in the existence of the Devil does not believe in the Gospel or in the Church."

You (Fr. Amorth) are the Church's leading exorcist. How did you begin this activity?
"By chance. For many years, I carried out my normal role as priest, hearing confessions, preaching, saying Mass, administering the sacraments and, above all, writing books and articles in the spirit of us, followers of St. Paul. The Devil and exorcisms only interested me from a theoretical point of view."

"Cardinal Ugo Poletti, former vicar general of Rome, and I were good friends. One day, in June 1986, I went to see him and while we were chatting it came out that I knew Fr. Candido Amantini. 'You know Fr. Candido?' asked the cardinal. 'That priest is in need of help because he is very ill, you should help him.' He began writing on headed paper. I realized that he was assigning me to the role of assistant exorcist and I began to protest. 'No, I can't, you know that I'm a rascal, I'm only good at telling jokes and playing pranks' but to no avail. I left the Cardinal with the role of assistant exorcist to Fr. Candido, and that is how it all began."

Were you scared of the Devil?
"Of course, but I also knew that Jesus had beaten Satan and the Virgin had crushed him. So I put myself under the protection of both Jesus and Mary. 'Wrap me in your cloak,' I said to the Virgin, 'and I will always feel safe.' And in fact, over the years I have performed over 70,000 exorcisms and nothing has ever happened to me."

What were your first experiences like?
"There was no time to savor experiences. There was a lot of work to do since Fr. Candido was in poor health. Actually, the most interesting experience was working with him. Each day was a surprise and a new lesson. By his side, I realized that books were pretty useless. Experience is what counts, especially concerning such delicate topics. It is as if a young doctor who had just graduated were given a book on surgery which would explain to him how to carry out open heart surgery. Fr. Candido, with his 36 years of experience, was an incomparable teacher."

"I realized straightaway how important exorcisms were for people suffering from cruel afflictions. And at the same time I realized that these people were overlooked, abandoned, and often left to deal with their problems by themselves because of a lack of exorcists. I realized that many bishops and priests didn't believe that the Devil could cause disease and other physical disturbances in people and, when asked for help, they recommend doctors or psychoanalysts. So I told myself that I

needed to inform people and thus I began writing, giving interviews, and participating in TV and radio debates, rousing immense interest. I wrote three books: the first is called *An Exorcist Tells His Story* (*Ignatius Press*), and it has been translated in thirteen different languages. The English version is already in its ninth edition. I then wrote *New Tales by an Exorcist* (*Ignatius Press*) and recently *Exorcists and Psychiatry* (*Edizioni Dehonomiane*) which still needs to be translated into English."

"This popularizing activity of mine has helped stir up debate and the indifference and skepticism of certain bishops, too. There used to be dioceses without even an exorcist. The situation has now improved considerably."

What physical troubles can the Devil cause?
"Various types, ranging from actual bodily possession, to torments, illnesses, and possession of your home. Demon-possessed people, that is, those whose body has 'physically' been invaded by satanic spirits, are very rare. But there are many people who are disturbed or oppressed by Satan."

And exorcisms can overcome these troubles?
"Exorcism is a medicine, a special help. Jesus said to all believers, 'In my name they will cast out demons…' (Mark 16:17). This power which Jesus gave to all his believers is completely valid. It is a power based on faith and prayer, which everyone can use in their daily lives. But this is only concerning normal cases, daily temptations, and minor satanic problems. When Satan, for particular reasons, decides to target a person and take over his/her body, tormenting the possessed one, trying to destroy him/her, then a powerful intervention is needed. The Church has established a rite especially for this very aim: exorcism. This involves a special prayer which is carried out in the name of the Church itself, by people entrusted with this role. This is why exorcisms must be carried out exclusively by bishops or priests who have been especially appointed by their diocesan bishop. Lay people can never carry out exorcisms. The results are nearly always positive, and at times, sensational. However, it is essential to have faith, pray a lot and, in certain cases, years may pass before a person is completely freed from demonic possession."

You mentioned that the Devil can also cause illness?
"Exactly. The Devil has the power to cause physical and mental illnesses. There have been numerous cases in which I have met people who had spent a fortune going from one specialist to another in an attempt to relieve their suffering. Yet their doctors, having carried out all sorts of tests, including the most sophisticated, were unable to find

anything wrong. And yet these people continued to suffer and feel themselves slowly dying. Such disorders are thus mysterious, but real, causing these people to lose weight, reducing them to skin and bones, and making them often bedridden. In such cases, it is possible that the Devil has a hand in it, and thus only prayer and exorcism can produce useful results. I have seen people at death's door, suffering from illnesses unknown to modern medicine, who have recovered, thanks to the help of exorcisms."

Who can catch Satan's eye?
"Anyone. I have had cases involving people from all walks of life: simple people, housewives, but also professors, doctors and politicians, lay people, as well as priests and nuns. It is important to specify that demonic possession and obsession involve the body. Satan can affect someone's body, but never their soul. He can only become the master of someone's soul if that person hands it over to him by his/her own free will. Thus anyone can end up in Satan's grip. There have even been saints who have been seriously disturbed by Satan's force."

How can we defend ourselves against the Devil?
"Above all, by leading a healthy life, devoted to God. Satan is God's enemy. God is our Father, a loving Father. Those who stick to God through prayer and a life based on justice and truth, through the guidance of the Virgin Mary, the saints, and their guardian angels, put themselves in a protected position. Even so, as I have already said, there are incidences of good and holy people who, for God's mysterious reasons, are put to the test. However, whoever lives in indifference, in absentmindedness, far from God, is open to an easy satanic conquest. Worse still are those who look for experiences beyond the limit and seek out the satanic world. In these cases, it is practically impossible to avoid ending up in the Devil's clutches."

What do you mean by "experiences beyond the limit"?
"I refer to those who deliberately seek out the Devil by joining satanic sects. They are secret groups which are difficult to pinpoint but which exist and operate. They are well-organized, they have meeting places, priests and rites which finish in so-called 'Black Masses.' Every now and then you read in the papers that tabernacles have been vandalized and consecrated hosts stolen: acts carried out by worshipers of Satan for their 'Black Masses.' "

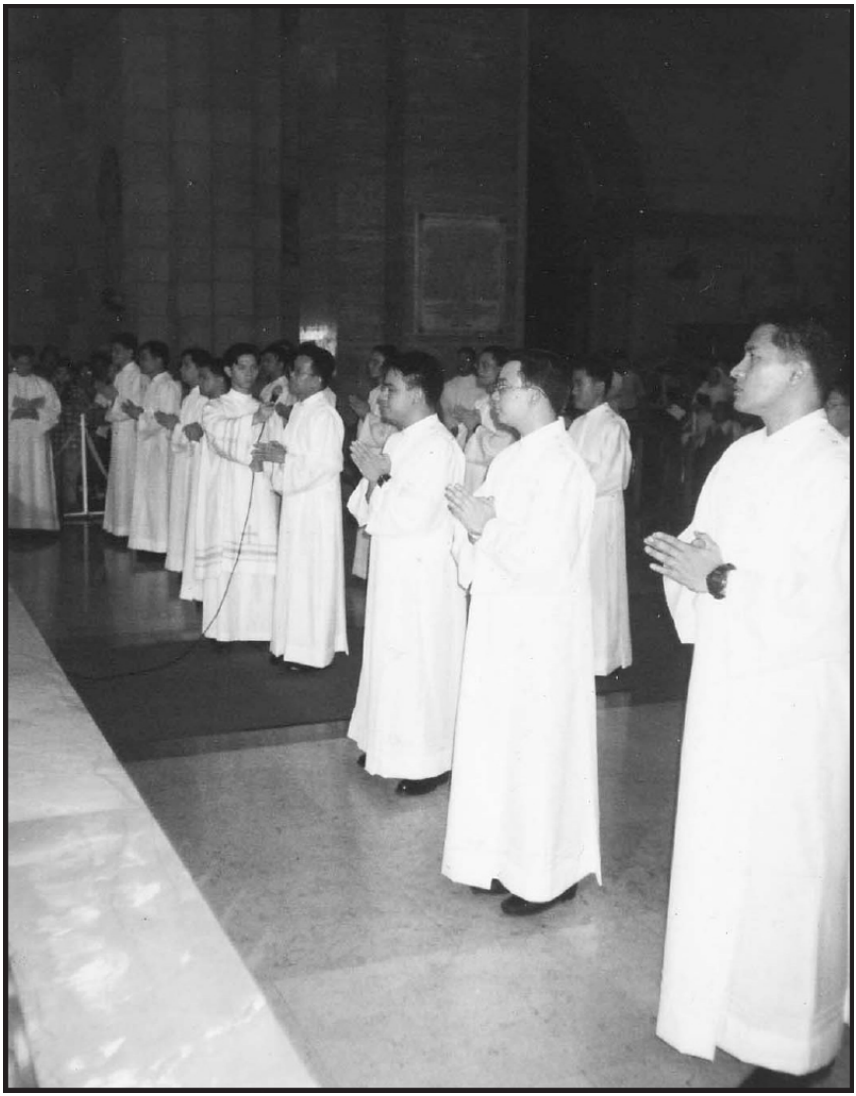
Have you ever met anyone who has taken part in these satanic sects?
"Some. Not many however, because whoever enters these sects finds it hard to get out."

Why would someone choose to be a follower of Satan?
"Usually for very base reasons. In order to have immediate benefits, for example: money, pleasure, success, and power. They tie themselves to Satan with real blood pacts. I have seen many of these pacts, because when someone tries to escape this situation, he or she brings me the written 'document' and we burn it together. These pacts usually read: 'Satan, you are my god, I give myself to you, I want to be yours for all eternity, I adore you.' "

Do these people who tie themselves to Satan obtain the favors they ask?
"Satan is a liar and a cheat. At the beginning he ensures that his followers obtain all they wish for, but then he destroys all of his followers because as the Bible says, he 'is homicide from the beginning.' "

You describe a dramatic image…
"I'd be a liar if I said the situation was any different. We must have a clear vision of the reality of our lives. Our experience on earth is a test, a battle to reach eternal life. The Church was instituted by Jesus to help people in their struggle against evil. But if the people of the Church, deputies there to help mankind, do not unite themselves with determination against Satan and fight tooth and nail to save their brothers and sisters, then Satan is free to create havoc and destruction with impunity. Satan's biggest triumph is mankind's conviction that he doesn't exist."

Thirty years ago, the notorious film The Exorcist was released. What do you think of this film?
"It's one of my favorite films! Of course, the special effects are exaggerated, but it is a good film, and substantially exact, based on a respectable novel which is mirrored on a true story. I recommend it. People need to know what we do."



Ordination

APPENDIX C

Manual of Prayers

I. CONSECRATORY PRAYERS

Praying these prayers from the heart aid tremendously in destroying any right the devil has over a person especially those who have formed bondages with him through the occult. The important thing to keep in mind is to pray these prayers with as much sincerity as one is capable of and to trust fully that one has been heard.

Consecration to the Three Divine Persons

O heavenly Father,
I desire to offer my self today
and every day of my life
with the self-sacrificing love
with which your divine Son
immolated himself for your glorification
and for the salvation of mankind.
O heavenly Father,
grant that I may fulfill your holy will
in the spirit of love and sacrifice.

O Jesus,
I desire to serve you with the love
which impels you to remain
with us in the Holy Eucharist
for the nourishment of our soul.
Strengthen me and purify my heart, O Jesus,
that I may serve you in purity and love.

O Holy Spirit,
I desire to serve you

with purity of intention and to love you
in union with Mary, your Immaculate Spouse,
with Saint Joseph, the martyrs,
and all the saints.
With them I will love, praise, bless, glorify,
honor, adore, trust, and thank you
with the Father and the Son
throughout eternity.
Amen.

Act of Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus,
truly present in the Holy Eucharist,
I consecrate my body and soul
to be entirely one with your Heart,
being sacrificed at every instant
on all the altars of the world
and giving praise to the Father.

Pleading for the coming of his Kingdom,
I offer you
through the Immaculate Heart of Mary
and pure heart of St. Joseph,
our worldly possessions,
our home, our family, our thoughts,
words, actions, and our very free will,
and our own body and soul
that you may dispose of them
according to your will.
Please receive this humble offering of myself.

Use me as you will
for the glory of the Father
and salvation of souls.
Protect me in the midst of danger,
comfort me in my afflictions,
give me health of mind and body,
assistance in my temporal needs,
your blessing in all I do.
Make me humble, patient, pure,
and wholly obedient to your will.

Grant, good Jesus,

that I may live in you and for you.
Amen.

Prayer to the Sacred Heart

Lord Jesus Christ,
we acknowledge you
as King of the universe.
All that has been made
exists for your glory.
Exercise over us your sovereign rights.
We now renew the promises of our baptism;
we again renounce Satan
and all his works and attractions;
we again promise to lead
a truly Christian life.
And in a very special way
we undertake to bring about
the triumph of your rights
and the rights of your Church.
Sacred Heart of Jesus,
we offer you our poor actions
to obtain that all men
acknowledge your sacred kingly power.
May the kingdom of your peace
be firmly established throughout the world.
All: Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ,
who, while you were subject
to Mary and Joseph,
sanctified family life
by your unexcelled virtues,
grant that we, aided by Mary and Joseph,
may be inspired by the example
of your holy family,
and so attain the happiness
of living with them in heaven.
We ask this of you
who live and reign forever and ever.
All: Amen.

Consecration Prayer of St. Louis Mary de Montfort to Mama Mary

in which baptismal vows are renewed

I, a faithless sinner,
renew and ratify today in your hands,
O Immaculate Mother,
the vows of my baptism.
I renounce forever Satan,
his pomps and works,
and I give myself entirely to Jesus Christ,
the incarnate Wisdom,
to carry my cross after him
all the days of my life,
and to be more faithful to him
than I have ever been before.
In the presence of all the heavenly court,
I choose you this day
for my Mother and Mistress.
I deliver and consecrate to you,
as your slave, my body and soul, my goods,
both interior and exterior,
and even the value of all my good actions,
past, present, and future,
leaving to you the entire and full right
of disposing of me,
and all that belongs to me,
without exception,
according to your good pleasure,
for the greater glory of God,
in time and eternity.
Amen.

Consecration of the Family

O Jesus,
behold our family prostrate, before you.
Once more do we consecrate
ourselves to you—our trials and joys
—that our home, like yours,
may ever be the shrine of peace,
purity, love, labor, and faith.
Protect and bless all of us,
absent or present, living or dead.

O Mary,

loving Mother of Jesus and our Mother,
pray to Jesus for our family,
for all the families of the world,
to guard the cradle of the newborn,
the school of the young and their vocation.

O, Joseph,
holy guardian of Jesus and Mary,
assist us by prayers
in all necessities of life.
Ask of Jesus that special grace
that he granted to you,
to watch over our home
at the pillow of the sick and the dying,
so that with Mary and with you,
heaven may find our family unbroken
in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.
Amen.

II. PRAYERS TO THE ANGELS

The angels wait day and night for our prayers to intercede more powerfully for us. They respect our freedom, hence patiently wait for us to call upon them. Through these prayers, prayed with a true desire for their companionship, we not only please them but glorify God for his great gifts of love to us.

Prayer to St. Michael

Saint Michael the Archangel,
defend us in battle,
be our protector against the wickedness
and snares of the devil;
may God rebuke him,
we humbly pray;
and you, O Prince of the heavenly hosts,
by the power of God,
thrust into hell Satan
and all the evil spirits
who prowl around the world
seeking the ruin of souls.
Amen.

Prayer to St. Michael, the Archangel

Prince of the heavenly hosts,
conqueror of the dragon,
you received from God
the force and power
to destroy in the name of humanity
the pride of the prince of darkness.
We beg you incessantly
to teach us how to live authentic humility,
so that our hearts
may shed off all traces of pride.
Light our way
with your flaming sword of courage,
so that we may stand firm
in moments of sufferings and need.

When you fought Lucifer and his angels,
you relied on your unwavering trust
and surrender to God.
In our moments of anxiety and depression,
inspire us to believe
that only Jesus will save us,
that once we surrender to him,
meditate and believe in his words,
our sword of faith
will also become burning like yours,
cutting the enemy to pieces
and lighting our way
to the Father's house.
Amen.

Prayer to the Holy Angels

Holy Angels,
God sends you to protect and guide us.
We invite you, in the name of God,
One in Three Persons:
Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit,
to come to our help.
We invite you to help us
because we have received as inheritance
the blood of our Lord and King Jesus Christ
and the heart of the Immaculate Virgin Mary,

Queen of the Angels.

May you inspire us
to seek God's presence
and evade the steps of evil.
Carry our prayers
in the presence of the Most High,
and guard us from words and actions
that glorify our common enemy,
Satan and his devils.
Amen.

III. PRAYERS FOR PROTECTION

Most important to keep in mind is not the prayer itself but the faith and trust that animate our hearts when we pray these prayers. The greater the faith and trust, the greater the protection granted. Like a frail child asking help from his father with full confidence, a childlike and confident plea for protection always melts the heart of our heavenly Father.

Prayer for Protection

Lord Jesus,
I ask you to protect my family
(*mention by name*)
from sickness, from all harm
and from accidents.
If any of us has been subjected
to any curses, hexes, or spells,
I declare these curses, hexes, or spells
null and void in the Name of Jesus Christ.
If any evil spirits
have been sent against us,
I decommission you
in the Name of Jesus Christ
and I send you to Jesus
to deal with as he will.
Then, Lord, I ask you
to send your holy angels
to guard and protect all of us.

Prayer against Every Evil

Spirit of our God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Most Holy Trinity,
Immaculate Virgin Mary,
angels, archangels,
and saints of heaven,
descend upon me.
Please purify me,
Lord, mold me,
fill me with yourself, use me.
Banish all the forces of evil from me,
destroy them, vanquish them,
so that I can be healthy
and do good deeds.
Banish from me: all spells, witchcraft,
black magic, malefice, ties,
maledictions, and the evil eye;
diabolic infestations, oppressions, possessions;
all that is evil and sinful,
jealousy, perfidy, envy;
physical, psychological, moral,
spiritual, diabolical ailments.
Burn all these evils in hell
that they may never again touch me
or any other creature in the entire world.
I command and bid all the powers
who molest me
by the power of God all-powerful,
in the Name of Jesus Christ our Savior,
through the intercession
of the Immaculate Virgin Mary,
to leave me forever
and to be consigned into the everlasting hell
where they will be bound by the archangels
Saint Michael, Saint Gabriel, Saint Raphael,
our guardian angels,
and where they will be crushed
under the heel
of the Immaculate Virgin Mary.

IV. DELIVERANCE PRAYERS

The first prayer is used for particular persons and places; it is a

command, hence the necessity of exercising your authority as a baptized Christian. We do not plead or request the evil spirits to leave; we command with firmness and confidence because it is Jesus commanding through our lips. The second prayer is a general prayer of deliverance that may be used anytime and anywhere; the same disposition of firmness and confidence also apply when using this second prayer. Before using both prayers, it is recommended that you review Part II of this book, "The Spirituality of the Exorcist."

Deliverance Prayer To Ward Away Evil Spirits

In the name of Jesus of Nazareth
through his tremendous power as God
and through his most powerful
and salvific name
I rebuke, repudiate, bind,
and cast you out spirit/s of
(*name spirits involved*)
and all spirits not of the Holy Spirit.
I command you to depart
from this person/place
and to go immediately
and directly to the foot of the cross.
I turn you over to Jesus,
my Lord and my Savior
for him to take hold of you
and dispose of you according to his will.
I pray that the Holy Spirit
would enter into all the empty spaces
left by these spirits
and for this place to be filled
with the spirit of love, joy, peace,
and (*name virtues or positive opposite*).
I ask the Holy Spirit
to remain here forever
and not to allow those spirits to return.
I pray all these in the name of Jesus,
through the intercession of Mary
and all the angels and saints.
Amen.

Prayer To Take Authority

In the name of Jesus,
I take authority and I bind all powers
and forces in the air, in the ground,
in the water, in the underground,
in the netherworld, in nature, and in fire.
You are the Lord of the entire universe
and I give you glory for your creation.
In your name, I bind all the demonic forces
that have come against us
and our families
and I seal all of us
in the protection of your precious blood
that was shed for us on the cross.
Mary, our Mother,
we seek your protection and intercession
with the Sacred Heart of Jesus
for us and our families
and surround us with your mantle of love
to discourage the enemy.
St. Michael and our guardian angels,
come defend us and our families
in the battle against all the evil ones
that roam the earth.
In the name of Jesus,
I bind and command
all powers and forces of evil
to depart right now away from us,
from our homes and our lands.
And we thank you, Lord Jesus,
for you are a faithful
and compassionate God.
Amen.

V. PRAYER OF PRAISE

The devil hates prayers that give praise to God, hence this prayer when prayed with full fervor and zeal expels his presence from the area. This powerful prayer is also prayed after ministering to someone who needs healing or deliverance; it is also prayed after personal or general prayers for protection, deliverance, or healing to give thanks to God and centers all glory to him. It is recommended that this prayer be prayed regularly, day and night, because it is our loving duty as his children to continually give praise to God.

Te Deum

You are God: we praise you;
you are the Lord; we acclaim you;
you are the eternal Father:
All creation worships you.
To you all angels,
all the powers of heaven,
cherubim and seraphim,
sing in endless praise:
Holy, holy, holy, Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
The glorious company of apostles praise you.
The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.
The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.
Throughout the world
the holy Church acclaims you:
Father, of majesty unbounded,
your true and only Son,
worthy of all worship,
and the Holy Spirit,
advocate and guide.
You, Christ, are the king of glory,
the eternal Son of the Father.
When you became man to set us free
you did not spurn the Virgin's womb.
You overcame the sting of death,
and opened the kingdom of heaven
to all believers.
You are seated at God's right hand in glory.
We believe that you will come,
and be our judge.
Come then, Lord, and help your people,
bought with the price of your own blood,
and bring us with your saints
to glory everlasting.
Amen.

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